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LADY LATIMERE'S DOUBLE

BY
LADY MURRAY
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TO
THE BELOVED MEMORY
OF
THE REAL MARNY

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PREFACE

THIS story was two thirds written in the spring and early summer of 1914. The temptation to revise and turn it into a war story was strong, but was resisted in the hope that the relaxation the writer found in finishing it may find a counterpart in a reader here and there.

The memory of a dear dead world is precious, and in that spirit the tale has been kept to the end.

The author's profits will be given to funds for the benefit of sailors and soldiers disabled in the war.

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LADY LATIMERE'S DOUBLE

CHAPTER I

THE ROCK

THE mid-day express sped on its way along the right bank of the Rhine. It was a warm afternoon in June, the terraced hills were green, the river almost blue through its wide stretch of turgid waters.

In a first-class carriage, hot with its sticky red velvet seats, plastered with injunctions of what passengers may not do, sat a man and a woman. The man in the left-hand corner facing the engine, the woman in the further corner opposite. A Baedeker lay open on the man's knee, at which he occasionally glanced, evidently intent on marking the various places they passed. The woman alternated between looking at the Rhine and quietly dozing. They had travelled from Flushing, and in the same compart-

ment from Cologne, where they had changed trains for Frankfort or beyond.

Tall, loose-limbed and fair, the man's face and clothes stamped him British, while she in her neat tailor-made coat and skirt and close-fitting hat, could be only an Englishwoman.

A dressing-case, on which her well-shod feet rested, marked with a coronet and the initials L.L. were the only indications to the man of his companion's identity; a label on a bag bearing the name Sir John Douglas gave her a slight advantage.

Not even the usual passport of travellers' conversation about a window or a corridor door had passed between them. The day was too warm for any one British not to keep everything open, and they each had taken control of their respective sides of the carriage. After leaving Cologne they had both lunched in the restaurant car, at separate tables, and he had remained behind to smoke a cigarette.

The man was evidently on the look out for some particular spot on the Rhine, occasionally craning his head slightly out of the window to look upwards. The line passes mostly close to the river, and the banks and rocks rise precipitately, so that it is necessary to be very close to the window to see such places as the Drachenfels and the Lorelei. As the train rushed out of the tunnel at Lorelei, the man rose, looked out of his window for a moment, up at the rocks that towered high on the left, then stepped into the corridor on the river side, and looked at the eddying whirlpool that there dashes against the rocky

shores. He stood for a few minutes and hummed below his breath a refrain of an old German ballad with Heine's lovely words—

"Ich weiss nicht was soll es bedeuten
Dass ich so traurig bin."

When the bend of the corner hid the Lorelei point from view he stepped back into the carriage. In doing so his foot caught the edge of the dressing-case and knocked it sideways.

"I beg your pardon," he bent down to put it straight as her footstool.

Their eyes met, and for one moment as she thanked him, some fleeting remembrance of her face in its chiselled whiteness flashed through his memory which, for some reason he could neither understand nor control, made him start. He was not usually either more superstitious or imaginative than are most Scotsmen, but somehow there came to him in a twin brain wave the scene he had just been watching, the song he had hummed and the eyes that had looked at him. He settled himself back in his corner.

"Forgive my asking you," his companion said, "but was it anything specially interesting we passed a few minutes ago? I saw you look out first one side then the other so I wondered. I was too sleepy to realise where we were and I hate guide books—I have never been this way before in the daytime."

Something in her voice matched her face and eyes.

"I was looking at the Lorelei rock; it's one of the

finest bits of the Rhine and its old legend always attracts me, though I fear the days for seeing the Lorelei have gone by; possibly as well, as her followers were usually drowned. I am not sure though," he added with a smile, "that one might not hear her yet, and her voice was the most dangerous part of her."

"I wish I had known, I should like to have seen it. Heine's poem of the Lorelei is one of the few things left me of the rule of German governesses." Lady Latimere smiled as she turned her profile for a moment towards the Rhine.

Her companion's quick eye noticed the perfect line of nose and chin, the contour of the cheek silhouetted against the background of the red velvet, the long level brows and the hazel eyes, curiously full of light. Again the remembrance of some such face came to him, but he knew neither where nor when.

"If you have not been up the Rhine before you must look at the old Mauseturm near Bingen when we come to it."

"Is it soon?" she asked, "because if not I am sure to be asleep again, but perhaps you will wake me up if I am, as it's silly to miss these things;" she smiled in a friendly way that banished the stiffness of the first few hours of their journey.

"I'll give your dressing-case another push as a reminder," his grey eyes twinkled. "You have another half-hour or more."

So saying he took up a French novel that lay on the seat; Lady Latimere settled herself back in her

corner, tucked a cushion behind her head, and in a few minutes was evidently asleep again.

The novel was not engrossing and soon returned to its siesta on the seat. Sir John Douglas quietly stepped out into the corridor, a few paces away from the compartment and lit a cigarette. He did not feel it quite fair to scrutinise that sleeping face to trace its puzzling likeness. He travelled a good deal, and it was probably some chance acquaintance, or even an unknown passer-by whose double he saw in his fellow-traveller. People with quick eyes and trained powers of observation are usually haunted and bothered by likenesses.

He dismissed it as being of no consequence, and only one of what his matter of fact sister Jean called his silly fancies. His thoughts fled northwards to an old grey house among Scottish hills, and he wondered if Jean would be out fishing on the river these lovely June evenings. He sighed. His journey was not altogether a voluntary or a happy one.

A telegram had reached him three days before at home, from Munich, with the news that their aunt, who stood to them in place of mother, was far from well, that the doctors had strongly urged her to rest there a few days, and then go to Nauheim for the baths.

Miss MacLeod, their mother's sister, had lived with the brother and sister since they were left orphans twenty-two years before, John being then ten, and Jean four. She had brought them up, and they loved her with a love and confidence that more than re-

warded any sacrifice she had made in the early days for their sakes.

Miss MacLeod had come abroad for a little tour in southern Germany, having let her small house in London for May and June. The hot weather, playing on sixty-eight years and a somewhat delicate heart, had brought about a collapse.

After a brief consultation, John and his sister decided that he should go out to meet Miss MacLeod, take her to Nauheim, see what the doctors thought of her condition, and then if need be, Jean should come out and join them. Of all things, fuss was what their aunt most disliked, and they had been taught to avoid it from childhood.

Just before leaving London, Douglas had received a telegram that Miss MacLeod was well enough to leave Munich, and that he would find her at the Hof at Frankfort the following afternoon.

As he stood in the corridor watching the passing scenery, he wondered vaguely whither the sleeping lady was bound; probably for one of the fashionable German or Austrian watering places.

The Mauseturm came in sight on its small island. He looked into the compartment. Lady Latimere's head was well down on her right shoulder. Was it worth while to disturb so serene a sleep? He gave the dressing-case a faint push, the sleeper showed no sign, another, her head went straight, she opened her eyes, and looked gravely at him.

"I have dared to obey you as we are passing the Mauseturm."

She sat up, felt her hat and stepped out into the passage.

"What happened there?"

Briefly he repeated the story of the cruel Bishop, eaten by mice.

"What a horrible tale, and I was having such a nice sleep. If I had known I wouldn't have told you to wake me up for old Bishop Hatto. Do you know when we get to Frankfort? I get into a train one end and out at the other, but I never know what happens in between."

She was standing rather close to him, and he noticed how small she was, the top of her hat only coming to his shoulder.

"We should be at Frankfort about four. Can I be of any use to you there?"

"Thank you, my maid knows all about the journey, and we are going straight on." She did not volunteer where, so her companion made no further suggestion.

She turned back to her seat, but this time she sat rather upright and looked out of the window. Sir John returned to his corner and the novel.

The train reached Frankfort. He lifted some of her belongings down from the rack, called a porter for her, another for himself, waited a moment to see that her maid was there, then raised his hat and was turning away, when Lady Latimere who was a person of rapid moods and direct ways, touched his arm.

"Thank you so much," she said in her low musical voice, and her eyes looked at him with a curious

questioning look that some rare eyes have. "I shall remember the Lorelei and the old Mauseturm."

Before he could answer she had turned back to her maid and the porter, and the litter of bags and traps on the platform, so John Douglas went on his way.

CHAPTER II

THE VISION

HAVING seen his luggage safely into the omnibus, Douglas walked quickly to the hotel, which he knew was only a few minutes from the station. Arrived there, he was shown upstairs at once to Miss MacLeod's sitting-room.

She was lying on the sofa. As he entered she sat up, her colour rising and both hands outstretched in welcome.

"Well, Marny dear, what tricks have you been playing to bring you to this?" He bent down, holding both her hands and kissed her gently. She smiled up at him.

"You dear boy, to come and see after me, though I've felt a fraud letting you do so, for there is nothing really wrong. The doctor says a few weeks of Nauheim baths, and the quiet life there, will soon put me right."

She lay back, her blue eyes bright and smiling, the rose still in her cheeks, her silver hair gleaming against a black satin cushion.

"You don't look bad, but I shall reserve my full opinion about you for a day or two; knowing your spirit to be about five times too large for your poor body. When is the doctor going to allow you to go on to Nauheim?"

"To-morrow afternoon, he says the sooner the better, and now I have you to look after me for a few days, I am looking forward to it."

John shook his head at her.

"You are much younger, of course, than either Jean or me, that we all know, but for once you'll have to pretend to be—well, middle-aged for a little."

She smiled.

"Have you got rooms?" he added.

"Yes, in a villa Doctor Kranz recommends; it's high up, on the edge of the open country and woods, so it won't be hot and stuffy."

"Room for me too?"

"Of course; we've got two nice bedrooms and a sitting-room on the first floor, and, I believe, a large balcony." She put out her hand to him. "It was very dear of you to come to me at once. I only hope my telegram didn't frighten you and Jean. It was really Marie made me send it. You know how nervous servants are, and Marie, for all her Swiss stolidness, has sensibilities somewhere."

"Marie is a sensible woman, and I shall tip her for that telegram. But how did it all happen?"

"Oh! I over-walked myself one day with the Ostenbergs; that Bavarian country is so wonderful and the air so stimulating, I quite forgot my years and

my creaky heart, and then—well, when I got back to Munich the day after, I felt rather done, and the next thing was, Marie found me in a heap on the floor. Wasn't it silly?"

Miss MacLeod looked at her nephew like a child expecting a scolding.

"Marny, you are incorrigible; luckily now we've got you in irons, so you've reaped your punishment."

He noticed the colour in her cheeks had gone and she looked pale.

"Now we've talked enough for the present; besides, I must have a wash and change. Later I'll tell you all the home news."

He got up and looked out of the window a moment.

"Where is Marie?" he asked.

"In my room next door, within call all right," she smiled. "Poor soul, she hardly dares let me out of her sight, and every time she hears a noise she thinks it's me floor-flopping again."

She gave an amused little laugh.

John opened the door she pointed to, and quietly closed it behind him.

"Ah, Sir Jean;" a tall fair woman jumped up. "I am happy you have come. Mademoiselle was bad—bad, but now she is good, *et ça va mieux*. She works so and forgets she is no more twenty."

Marie had been with Miss MacLeod now for twenty years, and did not mince words on matters that lay near her faithful heart.

"It is all dees goodness wears her out. Ze meetings wiz ze mothers and ze young men and women,

and the preachings and talkings and thinkings, yes and prayings."

"Yes, yes, my good Marie," John smiled, "but you see she is only really happy when she is trying to make others like herself. I only wish she could," he muttered half to himself.

"She was tired when she comed abroad," despite Marie's twenty years in Great Britain her accent remained the same, "and zen she walked on de mountains, until *prrt*, it was finish. But now you haf come it will be better."

"Have you seen the doctor?"

"Yes, Sir Jean," Marie looked dignified, as if such an omission on her part were unthinkable, "of course I haf. The lady she like him because he only stay five minute, and tell her she is better, but I don't like that kind of doctor. I zink he is a Jew," she added mysteriously. Marie was strongly anti-Semitic, being herself a French Swiss Protestant.

"As long as he does her good he may be a Hottentot," answered John, "and now I must go and change."

He put his head into the sitting-room for a moment.

"Am I to be allowed to dine up here with you, or relegated downstairs?"

"Oh! with me, please. I've ordered soup, fish, chicken and an omelette at 7.30, and for you a bottle of Hochheimer, is that all right?"

"Excellent," he came over to the sofa, and his grey eyes softened as he bent over and touched the silver hair with his lips. He was not afraid of oc-

casional demonstrativeness. "This is going to be a happy little time for both of us," he said, "and while you rest your body I shall rest my spirit and we'll both go home like giants refreshed. Now au revoir till dinner time."

As the door closed after him, Miss MacLeod gave a little sigh of contentment. She loved her big nephew. With all his manliness he had something of a woman's gentleness, and between the two was a true and deep bond, divergent as their minds and opinions often were. Margaret Mac Leod was one of those rare natures in whom religion had developed what all real religion should—a luminous spirituality that radiated from her, and touched all those who came in contact with her. Gentle and unobtrusive in her opinions, wide-minded in her sympathies, what she was, rather than what she said or did, proclaimed her living faith, and gave to her personality a quiet strength born of an unseen power.

Once when John was a small boy, someone asked what he meant to be when he was grown up. He answered that he wished to be a Christian like Marny. To him she was the ideal of all anyone could be, and having heard several people say she was a Christian he had fancied it to be some form of occupation or career.

At dinner that evening John told Miss MacLeod of his journey, and of the sleeping lady to whom he had played Baedeker for the latter part of the Rhine. Then he turned to home news; how Jean had for company their cousins Edward and Emily Ferguson, how he—himself—was once more being pressed by

the local Association to come forward at the next general election as Liberal candidate. John's advanced opinions were a serious matter of distress to some of his Conservative relations and friends. Even Miss MacLeod would shake her head, though she could find no answer to his laughing retort that all her "good" people in the little town near where they lived, and among whom she worked, were among the fold of Liberal sheep.

"Well, and what answer have you given?" she asked.

"The same as usual, the politics of our own little kingdom, attending to estate and county work are enough for the present; besides which I do a certain amount of spade work for them in the way of meetings, and giving a hand to neighbouring members and candidates. I want to keep free, and call my soul and my time my own. There's a good deal of selfishness in it, but there it is. I salve my conscience, too, by thinking that if I was in Parliament you and Jean would have a much more disturbed life."

Miss MacLeod looked at him thoughtfully.

"You know my wish for you always, that you should develop yourself along the lines best suited to you, where you will do most with your life and for others. And, dear," her voice grew slower as if entering debateable ground, "there is something I want you to do, much more than going into political life. I want to see you happily married; that would be better than any public work."

She paused, but John made no sign, though the faintest look of cloud touched his face.

"My dear Marny, I can't force a woman to marry me," he exclaimed in a quick voice, "there is only one woman I have ever thought of, as you know."

"Have you seen Mary lately?"

"Not for over four months. She told me then she'd never marry again, that the sense of Harry's presence was always with her, and she begged me never to mention the subject again—so there's an end of it."

He got up, and moved to the window, which was wide to the warm soft air of the June night.

"Forgive me, dear, I did not know it was as final as that. No one has greater sympathy than I for faithfulness to a memory." Miss MacLeod's heart had lain in a far-off grave for many years; "but it would be for Mary's happiness as well as yours if she but could; for the boy's sake too, and that property to manage, and all the hundred and one responsibilities meant for four shoulders instead of two."

It had long been Miss MacLeod's dream that John should marry Mary Errington, the young widow of a distant cousin who six years before had died of fever contracted in the first year of the South African war. Mrs. Errington was now only twenty-seven, a gentle, charming woman, with a mind and character that had deep-laid foundations, and in whose nature strength and sweetness were rarely balanced.

Miss MacLeod felt she would make an ideal wife for John. The last two years he had been much at

Barham Manor, the Errington place in Yorkshire, helping Mrs. Errington over estate affairs, in fact he was one of the trustees for the boy. He and Jean between them had gradually led her back to her natural high spirits, and encouraged her to go out among her fellow-men again.

His aunt sighed and smiled.

"It depends on your powers of waiting. Few people's word about their own life plans is final. If you really want to marry her, don't appear to do so, since she has said no, be her friend and her stand-by and the day may come when she will find out you mean more than that to her. That is my experience of a good many years as an on-looker of other people's love affairs," she ended in a lighter tone to ease the drift of their conversation. "And now, dear boy, we've talked enough, or we shall have old Kranz scolding."

"Good-night, Marny dear;" he bent and kissed her. "I wish all women were like you, but the only thing that matters now is to get you strong again."

When she had passed into her own room John lit a cigarette and stood at the window. The night was a light sapphire, and one or two stars twinkled above the roofs. His thoughts went over the conversation he had just had, and then unconsciously they found themselves on his travelling companion of that day. He wondered where she was. The look of the pale clear-cut face came back and haunted him; something of her voice remained in his hearing.

A clock struck eleven, John Douglas went to his room, and no dreams or hauntings entered his rest.

* * * * * *

The next morning while Miss MacLeod was dressing, preparatory to their déjeuner at mid-day, her nephew went out to have a look at the town. He was sauntering slowly down one of the principal streets, stopping here and there at the windows of the glass shops, glass being a weakness of his, when he passed a window full of pictures and prints. On an easel to one side was a large print of a picture of the Lorelei, sitting high on the rock, a lyre in one hand, the long hair setting the cameo-like face, while far below was a small boat in peril of being dashed on the rocks. A look of rapt horror on the Lorelei's face suggested the idea that the boatman in his cockleshell had been drawn to the fatal whirlpool by her witching form and voice.

John stepped inside and asked the price. That size was fifty marks, but they had the smaller size which was twenty-five. He asked to see it, bought it and walked away with it under his arm. He remembered seeing and admiring the same print in Munich. Arrived at the hotel he unrolled and examined it carefully. It was a beautiful face, he thought; if her voice matched it, no wonder she drove men to their doom. The look of sadness in the expression suggested that it was her curse rather than her wish that those who loved her did so at the peril of their lives.

He studied the perfect lines of cheek and chin (the

face was in profile), the delicate nose, the long-cut sweep of brow and eyes, the beautiful mouth. Suddenly he struck his hand on the table beside the print, and muttered to himself, "That's it. What an extraordinary coincidence! but the likeness is unmistakeable."

The face of the woman in the train came vividly before him. Now he understood why some likeness had puzzled him; it was his remembrance of this very picture. Strange he should have hit on it the day after, stranger still that he should have been arrested by the mysterious resemblance as he passed the Lorelei Rock.

He wondered again where she was; and if she had inherited the Lorelei's voice as well as her features.

Miss MacLeod's footstep came to his door, but before she knocked he had rolled up the picture and put it into his open portmanteau.

A week later, the Nauheim visitors' list duly chronicled that Sir John Douglas, Miss MacLeod and maid were at the Villa Linden. The invalid, in full swing of baths and Swedish exercises, was already answering to the life-giving cure and the ordered method and peaceful routine of the German watering-place.

The only disturbing element in their quiet life were the eruptive visits of Doctor Kranz. Douglas felt himself secretly sympathising with Marie's open contempt for the doctor's ways, but as Miss MacLeod visibly improved under his care, he decided that the man knew his business. How it was possible to gauge the state of a human heart by bouncing into the room like a round whirlwind, banging the door,

bumping a stethoscope against the heart, at the same time saying in a loud voice, "Ach dat is goot, or bat," as the case might be, scribbling some indecipherable hieroglyphic on the bath card, as the order for the following day, then bounding off again, was certainly beyond John Douglas' comprehension.

These volcanic visits usually took place just before dinner, when he and his aunt were in the sitting-room. He declared that it was to see how much the heart and nerves of his patients would stand, that Kranz behaved in this way.

After the first visit following their arrival at Nauheim, John had pursued the doctor downstairs, though it was all his long legs could do to catch that fat, fast-rolling little ball, but he got scant satisfaction to his questions.

"Ach I cannot say yet," shrugged Kranz, rolling his eyes and thrusting out short chubby hands, "the heart is old and inflated, its nerves excited; she must not walk nor drink coffee. I come again to-morrow, *guten Tag.*" He was into his carriage before John had time for a word.

The Villa Linden stood high, almost the last of the houses. Behind it rose the Johannisberg; below it lay Nauheim with its Kurhaus and Terrace, its park and baths; to the right the long street of shops, and further away the old town with its settled population of orderly, thrifty Germans. Far out beyond stretched the great plain, rich and fertile, waving with corn, its roads bordered with fruit trees; every inch of ground made to produce offerings to husbandry. Villages nestling here and there; their red roofs look-

ing gay among the fields of gold and the green of trees. To the west rose the forested heights of Winterstein, leading to the Taunus round Homburg.

Though it was June, the air was light and fresh. Douglas spent his mornings exploring the surrounding country on foot, while his aunt bathed and rested. He would start away and do seven or eight miles before déjeuner, sampling all the nearest goose villages in turn, and rubbing up his German on the goose-herds and the children. As his pockets generally held chocolates or sweets for the latter, the tall figure with the long swinging stride soon became familiar, and his German improved accordingly.

In the afternoons he walked beside Miss MacLeod's light, easy-rolling bath-chair, very different from the cumbersome variety at home. He and Johann, the chairman, talked of trees and forestry, for out of the season Johann was a forester in the state woods.

On the hotter afternoons they went down to the Kurhaus, and, sitting out under the trees, listened to all the best music played by the best of orchestras. Douglas was a passionate lover of music, though he made none himself to speak of, except what he could pick up by ear to try on the piano. Jean was the practical musician of the family, and when she came of age her brother had put a magnificent organ in the big hall at Raeford, whereon she played for hours, though the piano was still her favourite instrument.

"I wish the concert room was not so hot," Douglas remarked one day to Miss MacLeod, "and I'd take you to hear Gertrud Schultz when she comes next week. Jean and I heard her two years ago in Mun-

ich, and she came last summer to London. It's a wonderful voice and so restful and soothing. We met her too; she is a great friend of the Von Küstners, so if I can pluck up courage I shall try and pay my respects to her here. I say, Marny, are you up to coming to church to-morrow? I looked in there this morning, to prospect for you. They keep it open always, like sensible people. It looked so fresh and cool, and the seats are chairs, nice and far apart, so you wouldn't feel crowded or hot. We'd sit close to the door, so you could slip out when you liked. It would make a little break in your daily routine, I think."

"I want very much to go, and it's close by, besides which I feel so different already. Kranz is a wonderful little man, whatever you may think and Marie may say. You see, most doctors only know what their patients tell them, whereas he won't allow one to tell him anything, and he finds it out for himself. Confess he is doing me good!"

"Yes, I grant him that, and his whirlwind assaults are preferable to the bedside oil of the usual smart doctor," laughed John.

They were strolling home up the slight incline from the Kurhaus, she leaning on his arm. From one of the villas bordering the road came the sound of singing, and partly to listen and partly to rest, Miss MacLeod stopped.

"Im wunderschönen Monat Mai."

Schumann's lovely song floated out. It was the last verse, and there came after an instant's pause the

accompaniment of Maude Valerie White's "How do I love thee." The two listeners leaned against the garden railings till the song was done.

"I wonder who it is," said Miss MacLeod.

John did not speak, his face was still towards the window from whence the music had come. He turned and looked at his aunt, his eyes had a strange light in them, and for a moment his nostrils quivered as if he drew his breath sharply.

"I think I know," he said, almost under his breath and more to himself than to her; "at least, I know who it ought to be." He broke off, gave a little laugh, then in a different tone, "it's the voice of a mermaid or a siren. Don't you wish we could see her fish's tail and silver scales? Come along, she's dived and I must get you home. It is a beautiful voice, and sounds English. I wonder who she is."

That evening Miss MacLeod went to bed soon after their simple seven o'clock dinner. John strolled back to the music on the Terrace, which lasted from 8 to 9.30. The night was soft and warm and he sat far back, a little apart from the set rows of chairs, ordered a cup of coffee, and smoked one cigarette after another.

The programme was all Wagner, and he felt himself sinking into the sea of sound. The overpowering passion of the Tristan overture and the *Liebestod* helped to accentuate the curious restlessness of his spirit.

With all his native shrewdness and reserve, there was also that other attribute of the Scot embedded in him,—a love of mystery and romance, coupled with a

superstitious belief, not in omens, but in feelings. He dubbed himself a fool, but the thought of a pale, chiselled face pursued him, and the haunting voice he had heard that afternoon was its complement. He felt the one was the counterpart of the other, that only that face could have that voice, and only that voice own that face.

John Douglas was no weak sentimentalist, but he was something of a dreamer and an idealist, though few people realised this. The outer man and his life were those of a set pattern. Harrow, followed by Oxford, a certain amount of travel in Europe and further afield, a devotion to his own home and people, a love of sport and of country life, these in no ways set him apart from other men; yet in all he did and thought there was an independence of spirit and an unconscious disregard of convention that gave him a peculiar stamp. A passion for solitude for all his gregariousness, a love of music and poetry alongside of the sterling business faculties which found vent in the practical management of his estates. A radical in politics, but at the same time proud of his Jacobite forbears, a fierce Scot and a polished cosmopolitan, these qualities made up the sum of John Douglas, Baronet.

Man of the world, at home in many and varied classes of society, his relations with women had been kept high and chivalrous, despite naturally strong feelings, by the circumstances of spending much of his life with two such women as his aunt and his sister. Almost unconsciously from his boyhood onwards he would have shrunk from their knowing any-

thing about him of which they would have disapproved, and in his early manhood he had preferred to run the gauntlet of the jeers of companions of lesser ideals, than lose the clear conscience he carried into his pure home life, and this rule had not made him either a prig or a pedant.

Though he hardly ever touched on such subjects with Miss MacLeod, she instinctively felt that John's life was on a high plane in this respect. It was for this very reason that she so ardently wished him to make a happy marriage, fearing that if his fresh, strong life were not linked to a legitimate love passion, some day it would burst its banks, and from the very strength of its self-contained depths sweep him off his feet.

His Homburg hat lay beside him on the small marble-topped table, the lamp above lit up his brown wavy hair and silhouetted his aquiline features against the wall; his fair skin and grey-blue eyes coupled with a well-groomed high-bred look made two German women sitting near, nudge their companions and whisper that that must be an English lord.

The music came to an end, the night wind rustled in the trees; he walked slowly back, his mind a mixture of home and Mrs. Errington, himself, his present life with his aunt, while behind it all as a back-ground whose pattern was dim and indiscernible, the face of the Lorelei picture, and the voice he had heard that afternoon.

The next day John took Miss MacLeod up to the little church. The service was at eleven; it was

Trinity Sunday and the church was charmingly set out with white marguerites, cornflowers and scarlet poppies. They found two seats near the entrance door, only three or four rows forward, and on the aisle side, so exit was easy. They had come in a little late, and the church was already nearly full. The choir was gathered from various English visitors, all women; John wondered if the voice was among them.

The *Te Deum* was being sung, and his quick ears caught a note apart from the choir, near to where he and Miss MacLeod were sitting.

It must be behind them. Now he had located it, he would listen when the hymns came, and if it sang he would recognise it. A feeling of excitement came to him; it was like some stalk where the quarry had not been fully seen, and the moment was at hand to find out if its fulfilment was worthy of its promise. He was by nature a hunter, and once upon a trail, a veritable sleuth hound with strange powers of silent watching and waiting.

"Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty."

The choir and congregation sang the first and second verses, then clear and thrilling the words rang—

"Holy, Holy, Holy, though the darkness hide Thee,
Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see;
Only Thou art holy, there is none beside Thee
Perfect in power, in love and purity."

John Douglas knew. The waves of sound were so close to him he could not look round; there was no-

thing to be done but to wait, and chance seeing the singer as they went out.

In the hymn before the sermon he turned to his aunt to ask if she did not wish to go, but she shook her head.

Several people went out, John turned to see if anyone in the back rows moved. There were only three women behind where he and Miss MacLeod sat; two were fat and elderly, the third was invisible as she was bending down, presumably picking up a book or a parasol; in common decency he had to turn himself straight again, none the wiser.

The sermon lasted twelve minutes, a pleasant little homily suitable to that feast of the Church.

The congregation mostly passed out, and he and his aunt with them. The third figure now on their left was on its knees, the head bent low under a flowered hat; the figure looked small and slight in a pale grey muslin.

At the door of the villa John stopped, saying he would take a short stroll before luncheon. He walked up towards the church.

A slight figure stood in the church door, the head half turned back as if waiting for some one; another woman much taller came up, and the two walked out together. It was the lady of the journey. John was now close to the gate. He wondered if she would recognise him. Their eyes met; she seemed trying to recollect whether this was a sight acquaintance or a real one, decided on the last and slightly inclined her head. He raised his hat, and walked on, then

in a few steps turned, and saw her pass down the hill. He had no need to see which house she entered, though it was in sight of the church road, her voice had given him her address the day before.

CHAPTER III

THE VOICE

TIME was beginning to hang a trifle heavily on Lady Latimere's hands. She had come to Nauheim for a short rest, after a long hunting season, followed by two arduous months in London, more to escape from her home surroundings, duties, letters and the *va et vient* of daily life than for actual health reasons. She had been to Nauheim a few years before to keep a delicate cousin company, now she had fancied it for herself, as a place of quiet, with few acquaintances, pleasant walks and drives, and excellent music to fill in the hours between the baths.

Laura Latimere had been married at the age of eighteen to the twelfth lord of that name; an excellent cheery sailor, who had left the Navy on his father's death, a few months before their marriage. An only child she had passed from the care of a doting father and mother to that of a devoted husband, who did everything he could to give her pleasure and happiness. He thought he succeeded; so did the world. Now and again, however, something looked from Lady Latimere's eyes, something pulsed in her singing that told of restless currents beneath the even stream of her life.

There were no children. A baby boy born two years after their marriage had survived his birth only a few days.

She was like a piece of quicksilver, up at cockcrow, rarely still except when asleep; keen and ardent in all she did, filling her days with multifarious duties and pleasures.

She had been married ten years, and with all her peculiar charm and attraction there was much of the ingenuousness of the child about her still. A strange elusiveness was her greatest characteristic. One moment she was here, close and intimate to those she liked, the next she was gone from ken.

Small and slight in figure, with nut brown wavy hair, and hazel eyes under long straight brows, whose dark pencillings enhanced the peculiar pallor of an ivory skin. Her beauty lay mainly in the oval of her face and in the lovely mouth behind which gleamed a perfect set of teeth.

She was singularly devoid of conscious coquetry, and though essentially feminine she was more the friend of women than of men; also she was comfortably fond of her husband.

After a few days complete rest, which for her consisted in not getting up till seven a.m., sleeping at odd hours of the day, and occasionally reading a book, Lady Latimere hired a piano and beguiled some of her spare time practising. She had come across a London acquaintance, Miss Merton, who besides being musical was an excellent accompanist.

Laura Latimere was a true musician, and the possessor of a beautiful mezzo soprano voice, highly

trained. Reserved and outwardly cold, through the medium of her singing she showed possibilities of fire and passion that almost no one imagined of her. There was a pathos in the voice that could move to tears.

The day that Miss MacLeod and Sir John had been arrested by her singing, Miss Merton had said on finishing the accompaniment of a song:

"What a strange creature you are. Sometimes you sing as if you were marble, at other times as if you were fire; to-day you are all fire."

"Yes," Lady Latimere had answered, "that's just what I feel. I am marble and I could be fire. When I feel like that I let myself go, and afterwards I nearly die of shame for giving myself away so." Then she had laughed and rummaged among a pile of music for a French song.

"It's all right for you," her accompanist said quietly, "the danger is you may set the other people on fire who have not a marble ego to fall back on."

"Oh! no one has singed themselves badly that I know of," retorted the other. "Come on. Let's do this little thing of Hahn's and then go out."

That had ended the conversation, but in after days Agnes Merton remembered it.

The day following Trinity Sunday was very hot, and John Douglas waited till the afternoon before going for his walk.

He set out at half-past three making for Winterstein up through the woods. He had a map and had mastered the various signs and colours on all the boards that guided pedestrians on the woodland roads.

Arrived at the little inn where the evening air was light and refreshing after his hot walk, he sat down at a small table and ordered a *bok* of the lightest beer they had.

There was no one else up there, the season was early yet, and the day had been hot. He finished his beer, lit a cigarette, and sat watching the sunlight goldening the scene, and listening to a fat bumblebee buzzing in and out of a cluster of pale pink roses overhanging a trellis near his chair. The sound of wheels made him turn round, a one-horse victoria had drawn up, and out of it stepped a lady. She spoke a few words to the driver, who beamed and touched his hat, then backed his horse into the shade.

John watched her; before she turned he had recognised Lady Latimere. She came towards where he was sitting, evidently not seeing him as she was looking down picking something off her white skirt; when she looked up she saw him standing quite near her. She did not smile, but held out her hand. It was one of her peculiarities that she greeted even her friends gravely without hint of smile or pleasure, she kept those for unexpected moments which trebled their value. The world usually smiles its greeting when it first meets you, and looks bored after, she reversed the process.

"Ah! my Baedeker guide and counsellor, so we meet again. Have you any stories of Winterstein?"

"No old legends that I know of," smiled John, "but this evening unspoilt by fat Fraus and their fatter mankind, it might be a setting for Hans and Gretel, or the Pied Piper of Hamelin."

"No Lorelei or bishops though?" her smile came and the questioning look in the eyes.

"Not of German fame, anyway, and certainly no mice. Now mayn't I order you some coffee, or will you have some beer? It's quite light."

"Thanks, but I prefer coffee and rusks if they have any."

He rose and went towards the house, gave the order and returned to the table.

"Did you walk here?" asked Lady Latimere.

"Yes, through the woods, it's only about five miles, and cool and shady; signposts all the way enough to prevent a blind man losing his way. It's wonderful what care the Germans take of you and of themselves. I always feel half the nation are nurses and the other half children."

"Well, I belong to the children half, especially where ways and roads are concerned. I can never find my way anywhere, even at home, and the points of the compass are Greek and Latin to me. That's why I don't walk here. I should get hopelessly lost if I left the roads, and road walking is so boring. My one and only friend in Nauheim, Miss Merton, is not allowed to walk, so I am suffering rather from want of exercise, not that I mind in this heat."

"If you are fond of walking why not send away your carriage and come back by the woods. It is all downhill and will be delightful after the sun is low. It won't take us more than an hour and a half, and it's only a little past 5.30 now."

"I should like it indeed, if I am not preventing your going further afield. Will you give the driver this," she held out a few marks.

"What time do you wish to be back for dinner?" asked Sir John when he had dismissed the cab.

"I don't dine till 7.30, so if I am back soon after seven that is plenty of time, and you?"

"That will suit me perfectly." He sat down, took out his cigarette case and offered it to her.

"Not just now, thank you. I am doing a Lenten fast and only allow myself two a day at Nauheim, though it's more for the moral than the physical good of me. Tell me, was that dear old white-haired lady in church with you your mother?"

"No, she is my aunt, but she is a mother to my sister and me. She brought us up and we all live together. Perhaps," he added with something of boyish shyness, "if we happen to meet you one day you'd let me introduce her to you. She generally comes down to the Terrace on warm afternoons to listen to the music."

"Certainly, I should like to meet her. I have seen her several times down at the baths and in her bath chair, and wondered who she was."

Suddenly Lady Latimere gave a laugh; it matched her voice and was low and musical with a real tinkle of mirth in it.

"Perhaps we'd better know each other's names if we are going introducing. Mine is Lady Latimere and you are—Sir John Douglas, and now what is your aunt's?"

"You have an advantage over me, but how on earth do you know mine?" he asked.

"I saw it on a label in the train."

"And I saw only L.L. and a coronet on that famous dressing-case."

They both laughed.

"My aunt is Miss Margaret MacLeod, otherwise known as Marny, a hybrid of mother and aunt and Margaret invented by us when we were small. Well, now that we have exchanged cards, so to speak, shall we start homewards?"

They walked quietly down through the woods, a few birds sang overhead, the light lay golden aslant the trees. The talk between them touched here and there on their respective tastes, on London, on out-door pursuits, on music; easily and naturally, like two streams flowing from the same source and in one direction. They were both of the same world and had many mutual acquaintances. Lady Latimere also had the faculty of making people impart news of themselves and their lives to her, almost without their knowledge; while she said very little about herself. Those who talk least of themselves usually hear a lot of their neighbours' doings and beings.

John Douglas found himself telling her of his aunt and her sudden illness, of his sister and of their lives at home as if he had known her for weeks.

"Do you think I might come and call on Miss MacLeod to-morrow?" she asked as they neared Nauheim.

"But, of course, if you are kind enough. Won't you come about four, and we might all stroll down to the Terrace and have tea there and listen to the music. My aunt and I will then make a confession to you."

"A confession! Whatever about?" she looked at him with the hazel eyes wide open.

"I shall wait for her protection before telling you, and now here we are at your villa."

"How did you know this is my villa? That balances my knowing your name."

"Ah! that will be in the confession to-morrow. Good-night, Lady Latimere. I thank you for a very pleasant walk."

He stood bareheaded and made her a low bow. He was old world in many of his ways.

"Another day you may feel inclined to honour me again."

"Thank-you for belonging to the nurse half, and guiding my childish steps. Next time we'll go to one of the goose villages. I went there in a cab and tried to walk back by the fields, and got so hopelessly lost I had to give a small boy a mark to lead me home. And now, good-night, and au revoir till four to-morrow."

That evening at dinner Miss MacLeod thought her nephew in better spirits than she had seen him for some time. He told her of the afternoon's encounter, of his walk home, of Lady Latimere's promised visit, and all in a light-hearted way that did her good to hear, and made her feel that his time at Nauheim was not altogether without pleasure to him.

"How much better you look, Marny," he said on bidding her good-night. I'll have to take my hat off to old Bouncer yet. I say, though, don't get well too soon or I shall have no excuse to stay on to look after you. Selfishly I am thoroughly enjoying my holiday. It's so jolly to have nothing

to do, and lots of time to do it in, and just for a time the doors of one's usual world are clanged behind one, and one feels free and untrammelled."

Miss MacLeod looked steadfastly at him.

"Do you want to forget all your usual world, dear boy?"

John guessed her thought.

"Yes, I do," he paused; "for the simple reason that the one person in it has told me to forget," the light went out of his face. "I mean to, and this is not a bad chance of beginning, so don't take away my reason for being here, in a new world with fresh distractions and interests."

There was a touch of grimness through his smile. Miss MacLeod passed her hand gently over his head.

"My dear, dear John, I want you by me for some time yet, and if it's good for you I am doubly glad. Good-night, God bless you."

It was true; he was glad to come away from his usual round, the look of familiar faces and places. They reminded him of his loneliness, of the void by his side and in his heart he had tried to fill. He was a man who hated failure or denial; he set his real affections on very few objects, he had singularly few aspirations or ambitions, but his whole being concentrated on the attainment of what he did want. In the greatest of these, love and marriage, the first and only time he had sought either, he was met by failure and refusal. He showed little but he felt much. It was four months since he had last seen Mrs. Errington, or had heard directly from her. Too proud to sue for pity where he demanded love, he also knew

from an instinctive knowledge of women that of all dangers the worst is to bore them with importunate devotion. Deep down in his subconscious mind, in the part that wakes when the conscious sleeps, and sleeps when the conscious wakes, the hurt of it all was there, the sting to his pride, the defeat to his pursuance, the end to his dreams. As he stood on the balcony that night, only his conscious mind awake, the image of Mrs. Errington was dimmer, blurred by some faint mist, and in the foreground was the white face with the questioning eyes of his companion that afternoon.

"A new world and new distractions, so be it, why not?" was his thought; but deep down, far out of sight his truer self quivered in its sleep.

Punctually at four next afternoon Lady Latimere came to call on Miss MacLeod. A thunderstorm in the night had cooled the air, and John had suggested to his aunt that after the first preliminary quarter of an hour's polite acquaintanceship they and their guest should go down to the Kur Terrace for tea and music.

Miss MacLeod was sitting reading when her visitor was announced. As they shook hands the elder woman exclaimed:

"Oh! I am so glad it is you. We have met so often in the bath house that I seem to know you quite well, and somehow I hoped and guessed it would turn out to be you."

Lady Latimere's grave face lit up in response.

"And I know you quite well, so now all formalities are at an end. I hope you did not mind my suggesting to come and see you. Sir John has been so kind to me, I felt I must know you too."

Lady Latimere's charm of manner never showed to greater advantage than with old people or children. There was a childlike directness that felt safe in showing itself to either, and the latent motherhood in her took charge of anything that asked sympathy or help, and made her at her ease at once whether with old people or very young.

After a few minutes' talk in which they compared notes of Nauheim, its baths and Dr. Kranz, Sir John came in. He saw at a glance that Miss MacLeod had accepted the little lady and that they were both quite at home with each other, he knew he was glad.

"I thought you might have gone for a walk."

She held out her hand. She was all in white and the effect with her pale face was the French *ton sur ton;* the only touch of colour were the leaves among the white roses in her hat, and they accentuated the green shadows in her eyes.

"Are my manners so bad, or our guests so many that I must miss the honour of the first one's visit? On the contrary I went for a walk early in the day. Now I propose taking you and my aunt down to the Terrace."

"Is that good for you?" Lady Latimere turned to her hostess.

"Excellent, thank you. I go most afternoons when it is warm enough to sit out. The music is a great treat to me. Somehow at home, especially in London it is only possible to hear good music in hot crowded places, generally at tiresome hours, involving tickets and arrangements; whereas here it comes as easily and naturally as the air or the sun."

"I quite agree with you," answered her guest; "the consequence is that at home one does not go half as much as one would like to, or in any case it's much more trouble and often tiring. Here I bathe in music just as much as in the waters;" she stopped rather suddenly.

"You are a real music lover then?" Miss MacLeod had no idea her visitor was the singer to whom she had listened a few days before; that news John had purposely concealed from her until the two had met.

"Yes, I love it," her guest said simply.

"Marny, you don't realise that it was Lady Latimere whose singing we heard coming up the hill the other evening."

"Was it really?" Miss MacLeod's face flushed slightly for a moment. She touched Lady Latimere's arm. "You will have to humour an old woman and let me come and hear you again. But," she looked at her nephew, "how did you know, and why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't know then, I only guessed and found I was right afterwards." For a moment he looked down into the dark eyes. "Now I have made my confession shall we go?" that was all he said.

"I must get to the bottom of this," laughed Lady Latimere. "I have no idea what he means," and she passed out of the door with Miss MacLeod.

They spent the next two hours under the fluttering trees. It was a varied programme, but whether it was a Chopin nocturne, or a Slav romance, a wild Hungarian rhapsody or an outburst laden with

Wagnerian passion and strength, John Douglas knew it to be the forging of chains binding him and his senses nearer to the white figure by his side. She had neither idea nor intention of it, yet anyhow, of that he was certain; a quiet look now and again at her face, so pure in its outline with the far off look in the eyes, heedless of him or of anything but what she was hearing, confirmed his opinion.

A long way off, the cloud no bigger than a man's hand, came into his horizon, that would grow into the temptation to make her conscious of him, to draw those eyes close into his, to banish their questioning look; to see that pale calm face break for him. Somehow he guessed all that was in her power to give. Would he be man enough to let it pass him by without an attempt to seize it for himself, for fear of any hurt to her?

That was the question that day by day would stalk nearer and nearer, and it was born under the swaying trees in that hour of music.

"Will you and Miss Merton come to-morrow evening and hear Gertrud Schultz in the concert room?" John Douglas asked Lady Latimere as they walked back to her villa.

He had, between the music, amplified his confession, and told her how he had recognised her voice in church.

"It's too late for Marny, but if you two will take pity on me I will call for you at a quarter to eight."

"Who is Schultz?" this in an absent voice, her thoughts were evidently far away.

"One of Germany's greatest concert singers. She

has a fine mezzo. I think it would interest you to hear her. She very rarely comes to London. My sister and I heard her in Munich two years ago."

Lady Latimere turned to Miss MacLeod as if John's invitation and talk were so much vapour.

"I do like your *nom de tante* so much. I don't know what else to call it, as it isn't a nickname nor a *nom de plume;*" then suddenly turning to John. "I beg your pardon, oh, yes, about to-morrow evening. I will be delighted and I am sure Miss Merton will be too."

They had come to the gate of her villa.

"As I can't go and hear Schultz you must let me come and hear you one afternoon," Miss MacLeod said as she held Lady Latimere's hand.

"I only wish it was more worth your while, I am very out of practice. Will you come the day after to-morrow, say, at four, and Miss Merton and I will do our best."

"May I be included also?" the man's quiet reverberating voice was close behind her.

"No, this is to be for Miss MacLeod only, and it's your walking hour."

"I shall end my walk here, and stand at the gate, or sit in the garden. I presume even in this land of iron discipline that is *nicht verboten.* You can't think how well your voice sounds out here," he was serious, but his eyes twinkled.

"Like a gramophone, better in another room," said Lady Latimere.

"If I may come in, after being in the garden, I will then say which sounds best."

"As you please, Sir Scot." She turned to Miss MacLeod. "It is evident he lives with two women who treat his word as law. Good-night, and thank you for my pleasant afternoon. I hope you are not tired." Then to him: "We will be ready at a quarter to eight to-morrow."

"Is that a capricious little lady do you think?" said Miss MacLeod as she and her nephew wandered on.

"Capricious, no, but like a bird on a tree you never know which twig she'll hop on to next; at least that is my summary of her so far, and it's one of her chief attractions. Don't you know how dull and boring people are when one can always foretell and forefeel their words and actions. Also I think she's a bit absent, and unless her attention is arrested she wanders down her own alleys of thought."

"Well, she is a charming little thing, and there is a curiously pathetic look in her eyes as if she were looking for something. I wonder if she is happy—do you know her husband?"

"No, but I was at Harrow with his next brother, George Latimere, a very good fellow, and I believe Latimere is just the same, and a real breezy sailor with no nonsense. He left the Navy when he succeeded about ten years ago."

"Where do they live?" asked his aunt.

"Hampshire, I think, a fine looking old place, Hardene, somewhere near Basingstoke. I've passed it motoring."

"And I suppose they hunt and shoot and lead the usual English country life, varied by London and Scotland and an occasional run abroad, *vide* her

being here just now." Miss MacLeod smiled and then sighed. "My dear, what slaves we mostly are to our ruts. To me the monotony of so-called pleasure is the strangest of all forms of human slavery. I believe very few people after twenty-five or thirty do things because they really like them, I mean so-called amusements. They get into the habit of doing certain things at certain times of year, and once in the treadmill on they go."

"I don't gather there is much monotony or routine in that little lady's life," smiled he. "Nor does she strike me as conventional, and she allows to dislike of much London and smart society, and says Lord Latimere is the same. His hobby is still the sea and he goes yachting whenever he can, so your diatribe misses fire there."

"We must make a meeting between her and Jean; they'd foregather over music," replied his aunt. "I don't think I've ever realised before how fond of music you are."

"It's not often one gets the chance of it's being part of one's daily bread as it is here. Not that I know anything about it technically, only a smattering picked up from Jean, it's only what I like and feel." He paused. "I say, have you any idea how long old Kranz will keep you here? Another two or three weeks or more, I expect."

"He won't say; but I told him to-day I won't stay more than a month or five weeks altogether. But I am not going to keep you here all that time. In another week I'd be quite happy alone."

"Now don't send me away like that, and give me

no excuse to remain. As I told you before, I've no intention or wish to return home yet awhile. I have no work there just now. Judging from her letters, Jean is quite happy without either of us, and I'd much rather be here with you than idling and fishing and imagining myself busy." John bent towards her and the warmth of his voice touched her.

"My dear, I don't deny I should miss you horribly, only I don't want to be selfish."

"Well, please be selfish for once, as you will then give me the rare and unknown feeling of being unselfish, and I can cheat myself into the belief that I am staying to please you instead of myself."

"Why will men always make out they are so much more selfish than women?" Miss MacLeod smiled up at him. How good he was to look at with his strong bronzed face and clear grey eyes, his crisp wavy hair, his straight long figure and well-set head.

"Because men are more truthful than women, a fellow is selfish and he owns it, a woman is unselfish and she disowns it; she is constantly having to give up and give in, that makes for unselfishness; he is constantly taking and possessing, that makes for selfishness."

"Well, it's a good thing in these days that some men and women should mutually put each other on high pedestals. You know how old-fashioned I am, and I think the world was better and happier when it accepted the old law that man was master, and men and women behaved accordingly."

"I should like some of these militant ladies to hear you," laughed John. "If a mere man dared

'let out such sentiments he'd have his house burnt, whereas it's really good women like you who are a much stronger barrier against their ideas. Good heavens!" he added merrily, "what a relief it is to be in a country without suffragettes for a few weeks, where one neither thinks nor talks of them at every meal, and where women are still content to fulfil their side of creation without cavilling at our poor manhood. Wouldn't it be odd if we wanted to do women's work, and cook and sew and have babies and be cared for and protected, or bullied and cursed, and yet it would be no more unnatural than they should want to usurp our work. Now no more moralising and you must go and rest."

He led her into her room and rang for Marie.

The concert room was crowded. John Douglas and his two companions sat in the fourth row, Miss Merton furthest in, then Lady Latimere, and John on the gangway.

The audience gave Madame Schultz a warm reception. Tall and commanding, with a mass of fair hair and a serene expression, her appearance of calm and dignified repose was in complete harmony with her voice. Full and rich in *timbre,* it swept out in rounded waves of sound, pure as crystal, yet warm and pulsing with life, touched with a fire that had burnt the dross to gold.

Lady Latimere sat forward, drinking it all in.

After the second song Brahm's lovely *Ständchen;* when the storm of applause ceased, John Douglas said in a low voice, "Do you like her?"

His companion turned towards him, her eyes were deep and dark. She closed them for a moment, and slowly nodding her head she whispered back, "Don't let's talk now."

He leaned back content.

The recital lasted over an hour, and consisted entirely of German songs, mostly Schumann, Brahm's and Schubert.

Schumann's greatest song, *Ich grolle nicht,* roused the audience to such a pitch that they demanded its *encore.* Though really a man's song, Gertrud Schultz threw such power into it that her listeners forgot the question of sex, and only felt a human heart was being laid bare before them.

The very air grew dark with the throb of tragedy, and then to lead her hearers into calmer waters for the close of the evening, she sang:

"Es wär als hätt der Himmel
Die Erde still geküsst."

The voice floated out, like a sweep of angels' wings, bending from high Heaven down to the tired earth.

The three walked out into the starlit night, the last song in their ears like the quiet breath of even.

None of them spoke till they were clear of the crowd.

Lady Latimere looked at John Douglas.

"Thank you," she said quietly, and her eyes shone.

"It makes one feel good, doesn't it?" said Miss Merton. "I have never heard a singer combine such passion and such purity—I mean of soul, not

of diction only. She must be good in herself to convey such feeling of good to others."

"She is, I believe," answered John. "Some friends of ours in Munich know her very well; my sister and I met her with them one day two years ago. She is a great artist, and looks on her gift with a sense of deep responsibility."

"I wish all music-makers did as much," Miss Merton replied. "I sometimes wonder if those with real powers of music, especially of song, realise how much they hold in their hands for doing good or ill to those who listen to them."

John looked at the speaker. He liked her strong face and her quiet deep voice, with its sense of repose and thought. Her brown eyes returned his glance.

"There are comparatively few, I think," he answered, "who have the power of transmitting themselves in music to their hearers. I have always imagined the real hidden self shows itself then, and is beyond their control; if it is good it wakes the good in the hearer, if bad it finds the counterpart; bad is perhaps too hard a word; it's a question of high and low planes. We are all more or less like wireless receivers; we receive in the key we are pitched to, and if we are not in tune, high or low, we receive nothing."

"Do you hear, Laura, what Sir John says about giving and receiving in music? Just what I told you the other day."

"Well, I am sure he can only have received good to-night, and if he's afraid of getting anything bad from me he need not come. I've already said I am

only going to sing to Miss MacLeod. Luckily for me she has not heard Schultz to-night, else I wouldn't dare to sing at all to-morrow."

There was a shade of sharpness in the first part of her sentence as if the others talking at all jarred on her.

"Schultz anyway is beyond discussion," she went on, "and analysis or whatever you call it always bores me. It's like botanists who like pulling flowers to bits to see how they grow, and don't care twopence about their colour or scent; well, I prefer to leave the roots underground and enjoy the flower."

"There! You and I, Miss Merton, are put in our places. I, at any rate, stand reproved," smiled Sir John. "I'll remember my lesson to-morrow afternoon; and now good-night, and many thanks for enhancing to-night's music."

They stood at the gate of Lady Latimere's villa. Her face was inscrutable, cold and almost dull; her eyes looked past him as she said good-night, and she gave her hand to Miss Merton without a word.

"Let me see you home," he said as they waited till Lady Latimere disappeared into the villa.

"Many thanks. It's just at the top of this road."

"I hope Lady Latimere is not offended by anything I said."

"Oh, no, that's only her way, especially when she is moved and does not wish to show it. I don't really know her very intimately, though I have known her some time, and I stay with them now and again in Hampshire. She is an interesting personality to watch and draw conclusions from. Have

you heard her sing? Oh yes, she told me you and your aunt listened to her from the street, and you pieced her and her voice together in church. To-night she went into one of her abstracted moods. I saw it come over her during *Ich grolle nicht;* when she is like that she is beyond human ken, it's almost uncanny. To-morrow she will be her usual self again, especially with Miss MacLeod."

"Perhaps she has a dual personality," said John. "I am sure some people have, and she is unlike other people."

"Like duplex lamps."

"Yes, but they only turn one burner up at a time."

"It makes them much more interesting to watch, but I don't think I envy them."

They had come to Miss Merton's hotel, where he bade her good-night.

The moon was bright and high, the night air blew soft and cool; he could hear the crickets chirruping in the grass up on the hill. He went slowly homewards, his thoughts alternating between the music he had heard, the look on Lady Latimere's face and the words of her companion. He was conscious of a troubled restlessness in himself, a vague excitement of being in quest of something he could not define, a sense of setting out on a voyage over an unknown sea. Should he set sail for a destined port or should he let his boat drift? He shrugged his shoulders and felt time should be his pilot meanwhile; but he knew he had set sail, and turned his back on the harbour lights of home.

"I wonder what you'd like me to sing?"

Miss MacLeod was in Lady Latimere's sitting-room the following afternoon. Miss Merton was at the piano, her fingers running softly over the keys, her hat on a chair, her chestnut hair slightly ruffled, her figure erect in its neat dark blue alpaca. Lady Latimere was rummaging in a pile of untidy music.

"I'd like you to pretend I am not here," the old lady answered, "then you will choose for yourself according to what you feel."

"All right, I'll begin with this little French thing, *Si mes vers avaient des ailes.* French brings the strings forward into one's face and sets them in tune better than anything."

Silence followed the song. Miss MacLeod instinctively felt no common-place remark was necessary. She had the power of expressing sympathy without words. She smiled and gently nodded her head in response to the singer's glance.

The next was French again. The voice was getting clear and warm; it rang out pure and round, with the sound of a violin obeying a master's hand. Every word articulate.

"Now something German, please—Schumann perhaps," Miss MacLeod said softly.

A dive into the music, and there came that loveliest and saddest of his songs, *Sehnsucht,* followed by *Du bist wie eine Blume.*

Miss MacLeod felt a tightening at her throat. She got up and went to the piano.

"I wonder if you ever sing any English sacred songs or some of the old oratorio things?" she asked.

"Yes, I have one or two here, only—" Lady Latimere stopped short, "if you don't mind and aren't getting bored, I'd rather sing them last; if I do them now I can't go back to the other kind."

Miss MacLeod looked at her a moment.

"I too would rather keep them to the end now I know they are there."

"Would you like 'Auld Robin Gray'?"

"It's my favourite of all our old Scotch songs."

But she had never heard it sung as she heard it then. There was a pain and a passionate pathos that was like the tearing aside of the veil of a human heart.

"O sair did we greet and meikle did we say,
We took but a kiss and we tore ourselves away;
I wish I was dead, but I'm no like to dee,
Oh! why do I live to say wae's me."

Good heavens! Was this real or was it a vivid imagination linked to a perfect art? Miss MacLeod, through dimmed eyes, looked at the pale set face and the eyes with their far-away expression that for all the world seemed to search for Jamie across the seas. Inwardly she prayed that this young life had not already faced such tragedy. Somehow the singing was beginning to trouble her.

"My dear, you must not sing like that unless you wish me to make a fool of myself."

"I'm sorry, but I can't help it over 'Auld Robin Gray.' It always makes me want to howl like a dog myself."

Lady Latimere's eyes were guileless as a child's, and Miss MacLeod gave a sigh of relief.

"I wish John was here; where can he be?"

"In the street I expect, which he seems to prefer to closer quarters to the music."

She stepped to the window which stood open to the balcony.

On a seat in the little garden below sat John Douglas smoking a cigarette; his Panama hat beside him, one hand along the back of the seat, the other stroking a small black dog that lay curled on his knees.

"Hush!" whispered Lady Latimere, "don't let him think we've seen him, he looks so happy and comfortable, and so does Max; he is the villa dog and usually yowls at my singing; they'll keep each other quiet. Play this."

She had put a song of Bemberg's in front of Miss Merton, who exclaimed at the accompaniment.

"Of course you can play it; don't be tiresome. Surely you know 'Aime moi?'"

"Yes, but not to play it."

"Well, I'm going to sing it, so you've got to. You can run through it once while I talk to Miss MacLeod."

When Lady Latimere spoke imperiously, she took no denial; she could use her accompanist as a galley slave when she chose. She chose now, knowing Miss Merton would rise to the occasion. The music rushed beneath the player's fingers, almost faultless.

"She can play anything she takes the trouble to, really," whispered Lady Latimere to her guest, who once more was seated at the far end of the room, away from the piano and the window. "Isn't it lovely?" Her eyes lightened. "I hope you'll like it."

She went to the piano, looked at the song quickly, then stood turned towards the window. She could just see the top of John's head in the garden.

" Jái tant d'amour au cœur, tant d'ivresse dans l'âme
Aime moi, mon bon ange aux yeux bleus
Aime moi, aime moi."

Voice, words and music mingled together in a flood of joyous rising passion. Here was something altogether different from " Auld Robin Gray " or any of the preceding songs. This was youth calling on life and love for answer, demanding, entreating, commanding, and knowing victory in its grasp.

Before the last verse Lady Latimere saw the figure in the garden rise and look upward. She stepped back and finished the song nearer the piano. She was breathing quicker, her face paler than usual, while her eyes were large and light.

For the moment singer and pianist had both forgotten Miss MacLeod, but the latter wondered how the receiver in the garden was tuned.

" Now let's have the answer." Miss Merton picked out Maude White's " How do I love thee." She turned on the stool and smiled at Miss MacLeod. " I believe this was one of the songs you heard last week when you and Sir John played eaves-droppers. It's not quite such strong meat as the last, but to me it's the most beautiful love song that ever was written by one woman and set to music by another."

" And if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death."

The chords had an organ sound, the voice swept the words out, mellow and tender, to the verge of tears, with a yearning love that rose pure and free from the ashes of earth's passion.

Tears stood in Miss MacLeod's eyes; there came to her the vision of a white cross far away on the shores of the Mediterranean, with a name and a date graven there and in her heart for over thirty years.

No one spoke. Miss Merton turned over some loose music; she touched the singer's hand and whispered, "Don't go back to the lower plane after that; besides, you have sung enough, and as much as is good for either you or your audience."

"Let me do this one more," she put "Absent yet 'Present'" on the piano. "I want to;" this in one of her final tones.

She looked out of the window, but saw no one, then she stepped nearer to it, facing the room. The door was to the right, and a screen was at right angles behind Miss MacLeod's chair. After the end of the first verse the door opened very quietly and Douglas' tall figure looked over the screen. Their eyes met and held each other's an instant.

Miss Merton heard the voice quicken in the next verse; it vibrated with that rush of life that communicates itself to its listeners, that can mount to the head like wine. No true accompanist could fail to respond, so she answered to Lady Latimere's mood, feeling she was laying the reins on the neck of a horse that was already going full gallop.

The song came to an end; Miss Merton, to break the spell that was still throbbing, gave a short laugh.

"There! I refuse to play any more till we have had tea, and recovered from the last three songs."

John came slowly forward, his eyes on the singer.

"Forgive me coming in while you were singing, but the garden was too far away."

She looked a little dazed, still held in the music's thrall.

"Will you ring the bell and they'll bring tea," she said, paying no attention to his remark; she seemed hardly conscious of him. Going over to Miss MacLeod's chair, she said gently, "I do hope we have not tired you."

The latter shook her head. "On the contrary; and if after tea you are not tired, I want the English one you promised. They are more really in my line you know. Nowadays I hear very little of the world's music except now and again Jean takes me to a concert."

Sir John stood by the piano talking to Miss Merton. She thought his eyes looked tired.

"Well, and what has your receiver been doing?" she smiled up at him.

"Been rather busy, not to keep in tune but to keep pace. It was rather a varied programme."

"Ah! I see you understand enough to follow the score. If she sings what your aunt asks, you will have to readjust again." She got up and stepped on to the balcony. She liked this tall man with the fine face and straight look. Instinctively she felt he was being drawn by that vortex of wonderful sound to which they had just listened. She had seen others, men, and women too, affected by it before,

though she thought it unconsciously done, and therefore perhaps the more dangerous, for if the singer chose to mean it the power would be doubled.

John followed her out.

"Lady Latimere has the gift we spoke of last night, the power of transmitting herself through her music; she makes it the vehicle of herself in a peculiar degree. If her hearers are at all sympathetic they get a series of impressions according to her mood. She was at her best or her most this afternoon, which means she felt she was being understood. If she sings one of Gounod's afterwards it will be for Miss MacLeod, and you'll see what I mean."

"I expect my aunt's receiver will be most atune to that," his eyes smiled.

"Aren't you two going to have any tea?" called their hostess from within.

The talk then became general and went easily and pleasantly. Miss MacLeod hoped Lady Latimere would allow them to make a meeting between her and Jean. John suggested he should take the two ladies into Frankfort one afternoon to dine and go to the opera. He also said he had been to pay his respects to Madame Schultz, had found her on the eve of departure and had accompanied her to the station.

"I hope you told her she sent three people away last night feeling like angels," Lady Latimere looked mischievous.

"I told her in other words that an English lady famous for her singing had listened to her and forbade us to speak afterwards so as not to break the

spell. She was very flattered, and wished she could have had the pleasure of meeting and hearing you. It was she who told me a strong cast are giving 'Meistersingers' on Monday next, so if you and Miss Merton will come I'll get seats."

Lady Latimere looked at her friend.

"Oh! do let's go, I so rarely hear a Wagner opera nowadays," exclaimed the latter.

"That's settled," said John. "We'll go in by train, dine at the Hof and I think motor out. This is my outing and you are in my hands."

"He seems a born courier," Lady Latimere said, laughing to Miss MacLeod. "I only wish you were strong enough to come too."

"Thank you, my dear, but operas are not quite in my line."

Lady Latimere opened her eyes with the child-like look.

"But you seem so fond of music?"

Miss MacLeod laughed and touched the hand that lay near her for a moment.

"I'll explain my meaning some other day when we are alone."

"Shall I tell you what she means?" asked John. "Her time is so much taken up with good works, there is not much left for good music and those sort of things."

"John, be quiet," but his aunt's tone was soft.

"And the result is Nauheim," he added smiling.

"Yes, but only a cure of body," put in Miss Merton. "I am sure Miss MacLeod is responsible for many other sorts of cures."

She too had been won at once by the beautiful, serene expression, the sympathetic smile of eyes and mouth that all spoke of a great peace within, and carried their hall-mark through the world.

Agnes Merton had been brought up in the evangelical school of thought, and though in her riper years she had wandered into wider fields to browse, she knew and understood those who held to the more restricted views; "By their fruits ye shall know them," and the fruits were good.

"Oh, I see," Lady Latimere spoke very gently and gave a little sigh. "My old grannie was like you, she used to give me lots of nice little books, and tracts too; I used to read them, as I was so fond of her. I expect you are like her and you do good because you are good, nothing else counts really." She looked wistfuly at Miss MacLeod.

"You must not listen to that foolish fellow, because he is blind where his old aunt is concerned. And now before we go am I to have that special treat?"

"-Which of these would you like?" She held out three songs.

"It's evening now, so let us have Gounod's beautiful 'Glory to Thee, my God, this night.'"

A hush fell over the room. The voice rose like the sound of many waters, so pure and strong and sweet, lifting its hearers, as it lifted itself, away from earth into another and higher world. John looked at the singer, her very face seemed changed, an inspired look had come over it. Was this the same voice, the same woman that only half an hour ago

had sung "Aime moi" with such insistent vibrating passion? There must be two spirits within that slight, fragile body; if so, which was the truer? or rather the stronger? for they must be opposites, and in continual conflict, unless she was unconscious of all this herself.

Absolute silence followed the song, the air was too full of sound for speech; the singer's face was rapt. Agnes Merton quietly closed the piano. Miss MacLeod looked at John, but his eyes were abstractedly fixed gazing out of the window, then she crossed the room to the piano, and put her hand on Lady Latimere's shoulder.

"Don't hide your light under the bushel of lesser things, such singing as yours involves great responsibilities. Forgive an old woman speaking like this to you. Thank you and God bless you."

Miss MacLeod's blue eyes looked dim, there was a faint quiver in her voice as if she had brought herself to say something from her heart.

"Thank you for making me want to sing; it was you more than me that time."

John came up to them both, he put his arm through his aunt's.

"Come along, Marny, I must take you home to rest. She is not used to such outings, and old Kranz will be after me and say her heart is excited—small wonder." He looked straight into the dark upturned eyes, and wondered what the solving of their problem would be like.

At the door he turned back. Miss Merton was walking to the gate with his aunt.

"Perhaps if to-morrow is not too hot you would like another walk."

"Thank you, I should, and to the goose village."

"Certainly, we could drive there and walk back by the fields."

"All right, and Miss Merton can come too and drive home; it's rather lonely for her here, as she can't go far afield unless she drives, and she deserves a treat for accompanying like she did this afternoon. Good-bye," and she turned indoors.

Sitting on the balcony after dinner, Miss MacLeod suddenly said to her nephew:

"That singing almost frightens me. I suppose it's because I'm not used to modern singing and songs, but it is like watching a human soul undress."

John who was reading a newspaper, put it down, and said quietly:

"You mean Lady Latimere frightens you?"

"No, she does not frighten me in the least; she is a charming little thing, and sweet and kind, though I daresay she has a pretty strong will of her own. I like her very much indeed."

"But don't you see, she shows her real self when she sings. Judging from that its several selves, some very, very good, and some—well," he smiled, "not quite so angelic, but very human. That last song didn't frighten you surely?"

"Of course not. I think it's her power of making one feel that frightens me; it's almost uncanny and it makes me afraid for her too, as I daresay she does not realise what she is doing."

"I wonder," John mused and stroked his mous-

tache. "Miss Merton tells her the same thing, but I don't fancy she is a lady who cares to be preached at, and if she feels anything, good or bad, it will out when she is in a music vein."

"Well, I am rather thankful Jean's music does not take that form, and yet it's beautiful and gives enormous pleasure."

"Jean's music expresses her nature. She happens to be a strong, healthy young woman, direct and simplex, with no moods and little variation, a delightful *bon camarade,* but nothing subtle or ultra feminine about her, only with enough love of the romantic and beautiful to make her a music maker in her own way, but it's as different from this lady's as their characters."

"Well, well, my dear, you can explain all these things *á la moderne,* but I go back to what I said at the start, that singing frightens me. I only hope it won't lead the little singer into deep waters some day."

"It's more likely to lead the listener into the deep waters; she is perched on the rock high above the whirlpool."

"What are you mumbling about?"

He was lying back in his chair, his legs tilted on to the balcony railing, his eyes closed, he paid no attention and went on.

"Besides, aren't we rather talking as if she was a child? She's been married ten years, so to put the figure low she must be twenty-eight or thirty. She is evidently happy and enjoying life. I know, of course, passion has no age, also no sense of humour,

but we'll hope our little songstress will come through all right." His tone was bantering.

"You are in one of your flippant moods. I shan't make any more confessions to you, also I don't want to gossip about that nice little creature who takes trouble to give pleasure to an old woman like me. Good-night, dear, and don't sit up reading like you did last night," she bent and kissed his forehead.

A few minutes later John went to his room. From a drawer he took the print of the Lorelei and spread it out. That afternoon he had watched the other face, and it needed no imagination to see it in this. There had been no look of horror, but the lines were identical, so would she look if at her feet some one were shipwrecked and for love of her. The Lorelei sang because she could not help herself. It was her doom rather than her will; the curse under which she lived to demand and take love, to create and inspire passion, to sing on and live on, untouched and unmoved by the storms that arose at her doing, taking all and giving nothing.

There is nothing new under the sun, he thought, as he rolled the picture up, and nothing old either. How many old legends and traditions have in them an undying truth. There are modern Circes, and Helens, young Lucifers, new St. Anthonys, reincarnated Saint Catherines, Elizabeths of to-day.

Was it possible that here was another Lorelei? To this thought and the sound of her voice he fell asleep.

CHAPTER IV

THE SPELL

THE corn waved in the golden light, the cherry trees bordering the road glowed crimson, the geese cackled in their hundreds all round the little village whither John conducted the two ladies the next afternoon.

He took them to a small café where they sat in the garden and had coffee and rolls. It was all simple and clean and charming; they felt like children at a picnic.

"You must see the geese come home, they are so human, and all the old ones know their own doors."

They stepped out into the street and walked towards the common. The old gooseherd and his wife were collecting the flock; he cracked his whip and croaked like a frog. Some children ran to round up the outlying birds; slowly the feathery mass waddled towards the village, heads well up, now and again a large gander would stand and flap his wings, giving vent to piercing guttural noises.

"What fools they look," laughed Lady Latimere, "and so conceited, it really is an insult to call anyone a goose."

They stood and watched the waddling cackling flock wander down the long village street, and noticed how the grown-up birds went to their own doors and stood till these were opened to them; big wooden doors with smaller ones inset, behind which were the yards with oxen, poultry, pigs and implements.

"And like many so-called geese, not half so stupid as they look," said Miss Merton. "Now I must find the *droshsky*, and let you two start on your walk home," she added.

They saw her drive off, and turned back across the goose common, up towards the hill through yellowing corn, where a rough cart track led.

A short way up they came to a solitary cherry tree laden with fruit.

"I should so like some, would it be stealing?" Lady Latimere had her most childlike expression. Without waiting for reply she hooked a branch with her parasol and drew it down towards her. She picked two big crimson cherries. She held the stalk of one in her teeth, against her mouth it looked like a red bubble of blood, the other she held out to John.

"The woman tempted me and I did eat," he said, standing rather close to her. He allowed his eyes to look right down into hers; he saw them darken and deepen as if something welled up from hidden depths; he knew that his own were unveiled and that she was seeing something akin in them; neither spoke, but she turned away with a little laugh, half shy, half pleased, and the man felt that for a moment of time they had stood face to face with each other.

"What were you saying?" her voice came to him like a soft breeze. "Yes, of course, *cherchez la femme,* and all the usual old excuses. You can't deny you brought me to the tree. I wish I knew the owner and I'd buy whole branches of it. I'd like to leave some money like one does in lobster pots, only of course it wouldn't be the right man who'd get it." Her voice was quite natural and light in tone.

"Come along, I can't allow you to be so lawlessly English, or Englishly lawless as to take any more. Two seem all right but supposing everyone took two, where would the poor cherryman be?"

"Perhaps it's a wild one."

He shook his head.

"There's nothing wild here; everything belongs to someone."

They walked slowly on.

"Do you know you frightened my old aunt yesterday with your singing."

"What do you mean?"

"She said it frightened her to be made to feel so much, though she is not afraid of you, only of your singing."

Lady Latimere laughed softly.

"Dear old lady, that is the greatest compliment I have ever had. It's quite easy to make people sad, more difficult to make them glad, but I've never dreamt of making them afraid."

"You see Marny isn't used to having her emotions touched, and"—he paused—"well, you know you rather swept the strings in some of the songs."

"Miss Merton scolded me afterwards but you don't

know how hard it is not to sing the way you feel and want to, in that case I'd much rather not sing at all; and yesterday I was like that," she spoke rather pathetically, as if pleading some excuse.

"But that is what makes your singing so unusual if I may say so; lots of people have beautiful voices and sing well, but very few use them as instruments of self expression, like you."

He spoke gravely, no trace of compliment or flattery in his voice or manner. She made no reply.

"That is why Miss Merton warns you of your responsibility, and if my aunt knew you better she would do the same, in fact she did say something about it."

Her face was serious and slightly troubled. She knew her singing had touched this man, the quiet way he spoke of it appealed to her generosity, yet the power she felt within tempted her woman's curiosity and vanity. She was so safe herself she presumed those about her were steel ringed too.

"Were you frightened too?"

"I felt many things but not fear," the grey eyes smiled but were closely veiled; he was on his guard.

"Good or bad?"

"Both."

"Thank you. So my singing makes your aunt afraid and you bad; what a pleasant afternoon I arranged for my poor guests."

"Look here, Lady Latimere, don't twist my words like that. You know quite well that you can't expect anyone not made of stone to feel the same when you sing hymns as when you sing 'Aime moi.'" His

voice twanged a little with a metallic sound; he stopped as if throwing down a challenge.

"Don't be so severe, please, I feel so different myself too, that is the awful part," a tremulous smile hovered round the beautiful mouth. "Don't let's talk about it any more, or I'll never dare sing again."

"All right, and I know you don't like analysis, so let's leave the roots alone, and enjoy the colour and taste of the fruit."

He was tempted to tell her of the Lorelei picture, and the likeness, but resisted, thinking he hardly knew her well enough, and fearing she might resent it.

So the talk branched off here and there. She made him tell her more of his aunt who apparently had made a great impression on her and Miss Merton.

"I like looking at her with her silver hair, and that tall upright figure; she has such a lovely expression I'm sure she is a saint."

"Yes, she is, and her power is she never bores any one with her ideas, but she just lives them and people can't help seeing for themselves. You should hear her speak, too. Up at home she has a meeting for the people on the place every Sunday afternoon, as it's a good way from church, and in summer they come for miles when they know she is going to take the meeting as they call it."

"How wonderful," her voice was very soft. "And your sister, is she like that too?"

"Dear me, no, though she helps with the hymns and so on, Jean and I are just ordinary heathen, but Marny bears with us and spoils us dreadfully. We are a very easy-going trio considering how different

we all are. I wonder if you will be in London in July at all, if so perhaps you'd come and lunch or dine at our small house in Brook Street. Jean will be there then, the first ten days of July."

"Yes, I must be a few days in London on my return, and I'd like to meet the trio."

They were coming into the outlying plantations of Nauheim that border on the open country. A dawning curiosity was beginning to stir in Lady Latimere about this tall young man. From the way he spoke, touching here and there on his home life and pursuits, he must be well off. He was evidently his own master, with a considerable estate. He was not in any fixed profession, yet he spoke of work and business. She gathered he had seen a good deal of the world, yet he also lived a domestic life with old Miss MacLeod and his sister. She wondered if he cared for any one; that he was probably game for designing mothers she felt sure, and yet from his conversation and his manner she did not fancy girls were much in his line.

If she saw Miss MacLeod alone she would probably learn a good deal about John Douglas. When Lady Latimere was not in an absent mood she was extraordinarily perceptive, and it had not taken her long to see that he was the centre of life's interest to his aunt.

Arrived at her villa she bade him come in and get a review of which they had talked.

"Sit down a minute," she said when they reached the sitting-room. "I think it must be in my bedroom."

Instead he went to the window; a photograph of a man in naval uniform was on the writing-table close to it. John took it up. A pleasant face, clean shaven with large light eyes smiled from the frame.

"That's Latimere," she had come in behind him; "have you ever met him?"

"No, but I was at school with his brother George."

"Oh, were you? George and I are great friends, he and Teddy are very alike. It's really a pity he left the Navy as his whole heart was in it, and he's never so happy as when on the sea. I hate it, so I hardly ever go with him, and the poor old dear does love it so. He's in Norway now yachting with a friend. All the same, it's much more sensible for husbands and wives not always to be together and not for ever to do the same things, don't you think so?"

John smiled. "I can hardly speak from experience, and it would depend on my wife whether I agreed with you or not; all the same I'm sure *toujours perdrix* in companionship wrecks a good many lives."

"Exactly, and if only more people would treat marriage like that there would not be half as much unhappiness, or anyhow—boredom."

"And that being one of the criminal offences in life, I shall now say good-bye for fear of committing it," he was smiling down on her, "and I may arrange for Monday and the opera at Frankfort."

"Of course, and we'll leave it all to you. Good-night, and please tell Miss MacLeod I am coming to see her soon again if I may."

He bowed over her hand as it lay small and warm in his large one, and quickly went away.

Lady Latimere sat down at the piano in a few minutes, played some chords and hummed over a song. A smile behind which lay some lurking thought played round her lips.

"I wonder," she murmured in a crooning voice to the music, and she shut the piano rather sharply.

The next few days passed in their ordinary routine. Miss MacLeod improved daily. John Douglas took longer and longer walks. Lady Latimere withdrew into her shell. The old lady met her only once in the bath house, and they drove home together. There was no sign of her in church, no sound of singing came from the villa.

Late on Sunday evening Sir John left a note for her, asking if she were at home. She was out. After dinner came an answer that Miss Merton and she would meet him at the station the following afternoon at the appointed hour.

The next day was luckily cool and fresh. John Douglas and his two companions reached the hotel at Frankfort about five. He ordered dinner at six, and suggested they should go for a short stroll.

"You know Frankfort is the cradle of the Rothschilds, and the house of their ancestor is still shown, not far from the river."

"I don't think I want to see it," said Lady Latimere. "Let's walk down this nice big street and look at some of the shops."

John knew they would pass his picture shop, and thought if the Lorelei was still in the window he would prove if only his eye saw the likeness. They strolled on, stopping here and there until they came to it. Yes, the big print that had attracted his attention was still on its easel.

"This may interest you, Lady Latimere," he said in a casual voice, "that is a picture of the Lorelei on her rock, singing a fisherman to his death. I saw it the day after our journey, and remembered having seen it in Munich. I fancy the picture of it is in Vienna."

Both women were looking at it.

Miss Merton exclaimed: "But it's very like you, Laura, it's just your profile and mouth, though I'm glad I've never seen you with that expression yet, but you could make yourself look exactly like it. Do you see it, Sir John?"

"Of course I do. Wasn't it odd that I should come across it the day after Lady Latimere and I passed the Lorelei rock together in the train."

"Of course one doesn't know one's own profile well so I can't see a striking likeness, but it's very flattering. If it wasn't so big I'd buy one and take it home to Latimere as my latest photograph done in Germany."

"They have a smaller size. Let me go in and get it for you, as a souvenir of your first meeting with your double," he looked rather intently at her. Miss Merton had moved on to the other window of the same shop beyond the door.

"I bought one myself, though I did not recognise

the likeness till I examined it afterwards, and then I knew why your face in the train seemed familiar to me, it was my recollection of this picture."

"How very odd we should have met at the Lorelei rock, so to speak," her voice was slow and musing; "Yes, I should like to have it, thank you."

He went into the shop and reappeared with a roll under his arm.

"I shall have it framed and put it near my piano at home where I sing, to remind me."

"And to warn," he answered, adding

"'Ich glaube die Wellen verschlingen
Am Ende Schiffer und Kahn
Und dass hat mit ihrem Singen
Die Lorelei gethan.'

You see it isn't only the face, she's bequeathed you her voice too."

"A double heritage of woe," laughed Miss Merton who had rejoined them, "some day I shall dress you up like that, and some one shall photograph you, and then you'll see how like the original you are."

"The point above the lake at home would be a splendid place, and Sir John shall be down below in the boat. We can easily rig up a sail, to complete the picture," she looked up at him, smiling.

"As the lake isn't a whirlpool and I can swim, I'm quite ready to play my part, only remember it may give you one moment's qualm when the waters close over my head, but the next fisher fool will soon replace me."

"And you?" this in a low tone.

"The Lorelei never asked her victims how they felt; you must stick to the rules," but his eyes deepened as he walked beside her.

Their dinner went off quickly and merrily. They were all in a gay mood, and the ripple of talk and laughter was constant.

The two women had taken off their hats to avoid the annoyance of having to do so at the opera; they would retrieve them before motoring back. Lady Latimere was dressed entirely in black, the neck slightly open, where the whiteness of her throat and the sheen of a beautiful string of pearls vied with each other for contrast. Her hair was parted at one side and showed the shapeliness of the small head. It was the first time John Douglas had seen her without a hat and "behold she was fair to look on."

The opera began at 6.45. The house, fine and spacious, was full. They sat in the stalls. The cast was of Germany's best, and they found themselves listening and looking at a representation of the Meistersingers as Wagner himself desired it. Music, singing and acting the very embodiment of that gracious comedy of sound and feeling.

The five hours passed like two. Between the acts they sauntered in the *foyer*, they drank coffee, they looked at the audience, they compared notes of former performances and singers in London, but they all agreed in voting this the best they had ever heard.

Walther's Preislied, that most haunting song, held them spellbound, though it was to the magnificent Hans Sachs they all gave the palm.

"I am so sorry for him always," said Lady Lati-

mere after the second act, "I do wish Eva could have loved them both."

"Ah! but you remember that Hans Sachs wouldn't be a King Mark."

"Yes, but Isolde didn't love Mark, so that is different."

"I wish they'd give Tristan, I should like to hear it here, with you," he was relaxing his guard a little.

She shook her head. "It's almost incredible but I've never heard it in opera, something always prevents me, though of course I know most of the music well, and the story, as it's one of my favourites."

"You've never heard and seen it in one?" he spoke very slowly, "then I tryst you to it now, my lady," for the first time he dropped her more formal name; "it will be given early in July again in London, if you are there, and my sister and I at the same time, will you come?"

She hesitated.

"I will take no denial," his voice was masterful, and he stepped closer to her. Miss Merton was lost in a book of the words, and these two had walked away from the table where they had had coffee.

"Yes, if I can."

"You must, and if not, then at some other time. It's a chance of a life-time to take some one like you to Tristan for their first time; don't let me forego it, promise me," he spoke low but vehemently, and his eyes were like steel.

"I don't know what you'll expect me to do. I shall probably sit mum, and end howling, but if you

care to take the chance I'll try and behave," her tone was slightly mocking, he wondered whether in rebuff to his unusual vehemence. He bowed slightly and they returned to fetch Miss Merton for the third act.

It was half-past eleven when they reached the hotel. A small supper of hot soup and sandwiches awaited them, after which the two ladies tied their hats and heads on with motor veils, and found John and a large comfortable looking Mercédes landaulette at the door.

"I presume you would like it open this fine night?" he asked.

"Certainly."

He spoke a few words to the driver and stood at the motor door while they got in.

"Where are you going to sit, Sir John?" asked Miss Merton.

"Beside the driver."

"There's lots of room inside, come along and sit bodkin; this seat would hold four abreast easily," Lady Latimere leant forward and beckoned to him.

"But I shall crowd you both."

"We are none of us elephantine in the beam as Teddy says; come and see, if you don't like it you can go outside or sit with your back."

He got in and found ample room. His plan of ordering a large car with a big body had answered admirably.

Before long they were clear of Frankfort out into the great silent plain; it lay white in the moonlight. The road, broad and level, stretched like a silver ribbon in front.

"How I love motoring at night, especially in a big silent car like this," Lady Latimere's voice had a purring sound of content.

"Yes, but to make it complete one should go on through the night into the dawn," said John. "Sometimes I've left home or London as the case may be, about midnight in summer, and motored till breakfast; the rest of the day seems so dried up and tired like when one's been in the freshness of its first hours."

"I am so thankful I was born getting up early, though it doesn't do to talk about it as other people who don't, do resent it so, it makes one feel almost criminal, and it's really the lie-abeds who ought to be ashamed."

"No, I must say, Laura, you are one of the few early risers who don't prate about it for the rest of the day."

"Well, I expect we shall none of us be very early afield to-morrow morning," said John. "There's nothing like motoring in night air to make one sleep late."

By degrees the talk dozed away to silence. The car kept a level pace of about twenty-five miles an hour except through the sleeping villages where it slowed down.

Douglas sat slightly forward for fear of being in the way. After a while he glanced round at his companions. Miss Merton was leaning back on his left, her head slightly averted looking at the country as it lay silvered under the moon. Lady Latimere's eyes were closed, her head at an angle towards him

that suggested sleep. He drew the rug closer up over her, the night air was fresh. He himself felt strangely awake. The conversation in front of the picture shop, the hours spent with her, though they were *à trois*, the music and passionate singing of the Preislied, and now this close nearness as they sped through the dark, and she asleep, almost touching him, acted on him like so much stimulant. He felt his boat was flying with set sails straight before the wind, bound, God alone knew whither.

There was a beat in his veins, a growing excitement in his blood, and so strong was the anodyne to his past pain that he gave himself up to it, as a sufferer seeks the relief of drugs.

Yet he was under no delusion, and in that swift silent moving through the night he saw himself as if he had been watching another man. He knew his senses were entrapped, dominated by this strange personality by his side, the elusiveness of her drew him on, and set his hunter's proclivities on the *qui vive*. All the inner roads of his life appeared closed to him. The road to marriage was barred, he desired none other as his wife but the woman who had said him nay; the only love he had known was founded on the rock of friendship, from whence had sprung a great compassion culminating in a deeper feeling, that too was barred. What then was this near road upon which he suddenly found himself? Was it that of passion? If so it was barred sinister, his honour and his chivalry blazoned clean on his scutcheon and he meant to keep them so. John Douglas cared nothing for the letter of the law; the

woman beside him was another man's wife, but that was only an outward and physical fact which concerned him not at all. Herein lay his Scot's mysticism, though he was unconscious of it. That any one possessed her body did not touch the fringe of the deeper question. Whether any human being was in possession of her spirit and inner self or were they not there to be possessed? This should be his quest. To find out if this new found Lorelei had a heart and soul. That she had emotions and aspirations he was fully aware, they found vent in her singing, that she had the power of physical attraction showed in her eyes and her enigmatic smile, that she was kind and thoughtful he had seen, but all this was beside the mark, for these were all of the surface, what went on in the deeps below the upper currents? If like her prototype she was always taking without giving, being loved without loving, rousing to passion and remaining ice, he need fear no ill to her, for himself that was no one's business but his own; if she showed signs of being more human than her Rhine forerunner he would have solved the quest, and would go his way before any awakening that could bring her sorrow or harm.

Thus John Douglas mapped his strange campaign, arrogant in his measured self-control, saying to the winds and waves of his heart and senses "Thus far thou shalt go and no further," thinking himself, as all of us do, master of his fate, little realising that he was being shot to and fro in the loom that never ceases day nor night weaving the web of a human life.

The old church clock of Nauheim struck three quarters after midnight as the motor came slowly through the town, and a few minutes later it drew up at Miss Merton's hotel. John touched the hand that lay near him.

"I'm afraid you must wake up," he said quietly.

Lady Latimere gave a little start and woke up.

"Where are we, at the Mauseturm?"

"I hope not for Miss Merton's sake as she has to go in here," he jumped out.

"Good-night, Laura. Don't move, and I'll thank you properly to-morrow for my delightful outing when you are really awake. I won't keep you waiting either," she was standing beside John now, "but I feel you know how I have enjoyed it all."

In another moment she was into the hotel. He got back into the motor, and signed to the man to turn down the hill to the right. They drew up at the villa, and John stood by the door of the car to help Lady Latimere out.

"Oh, I'm so stiff," she stood up.

"I hope you haven't got cold. We ought not to have let you sleep so long."

She took his outstretched hand. Her foot tripped in the rug but he caught her and lifted her safe to the ground. How small and light she was.

"One of my feet is asleep," she laughed, "lucky you were there, or I'd have gone headlong."

He had kept one of her hands and he slipped it through his arm.

"You haven't hurt yourself?" he bent towards her.

"Not a bit, thank you," she attempted to draw away her hand, but he closed the arm it lay on.

"Let me take you to the door or you may trip on the steps in the dark."

"Now I am all right;" they were on the doorstep; she brought out a latchkey, he took it from her and opened the door. In her left hand she held the roll of the Lorelei print.

"Good-night, and we must meet to-morrow some time to settle up. Thank you so much for such a delightful expedition," her voice was warm and soft.

"Good-night, my lady, all the thanks are on my side," he raised her hand and bent his head to kiss it, her eyes were dark and clear as the night above them.

"Good-night," she said quietly.

The door closed after her. John Douglas after paying the driver, walked quickly back up the hill, and let himself into the Villa Linden.

* * * * * *

"I have told Doctor Kranz I am going home the end of next week," announced Miss MacLeod the next day. Her nephew had regaled her at déjeuner with an account of Frankfort, the opera and the drive home.

"And does Dr. Kranz announce the same to you?"

"He shrugged his shoulders and said I was in a great hurry, but I know from several people here and at home that he'd keep all his patients here for weeks, and the only thing is to judge for oneself, and take

the law into one's own hands. I shall have been here over four weeks, and that's enough."

"Well, if it's really right and Kranz tells me so, I shall stay and take you home."

"Oh, John dear, I can't keep you all that time. You know Marie is a born traveller."

"My dear Marny, you've given us one fright this summer, my nerves won't stand another, and I see you home, so that's an end of it."

Miss MacLeod's face pinked with pleasure.

"You do spoil me and it's very nice."

"Do unto others, etc., you have spoilt me all my life."

Marie at this point entered the room with a medicine glass.

"We are going home end of next week, what do you say?" John looked up at the gaunt face, with its ash coloured hair in the straight bands in front.

"I tink dat is right for the doctor wishes her longer."

John laughed outright.

"I believe if you were ill you'd rather die on your own than be cured by Kranz."

She gave a grim smile.

"Marie is a good hater," said her mistress, "but you must be just, for the Doctor has done me much good."

"Ah, Mademoiselle, dat is de good bats, and de good air *et le bon Dieu.*"

"It's no use." He lay back in his chair with a chuckle, "Don't let's try and upset her splendid hate and unfaith."

Marie stalked out of the room, glass in hand.

"I positively tremble if she is in the room when Kranz comes; she stands glowering at him, but he talks so I don't think he notices."

"Well, I must waylay him somehow and see if he satisfies me, as I am not going to cart you home at your bidding without his sanction. Now I'm off for some exercise after last night's dissipation, and I'll come and join you on the Terrace about five or a bit later."

He left Miss MacLeod on the balcony with her work and books, and she saw him swing along the road and turn up towards Johannisberg.

At half-past four she had installed herself in her favourite corner on the Terrace in the shade under the trees, well back from the people and within comfortable hearing of the music. Coming towards her she saw Lady Latimere. She motioned to the empty chair beside her.

"I went to find you at your villa and they told me you had come down here so I pursued you."

"That was friendly of you. I hear your Frankfort expedition was quite a success, at least from John's point of view."

"Oh! but it was delightful, and he thought of everything. I must see him to settle accounts."

"He's gone for a walk, but I am sure he won't hear of any settlement."

"But I shall insist."

"I shall be amused to see who wins, as he is quite an impossible person in that sort of way."

"We'll see.. I can be very impossible too." The eyes narrowed for a moment and the mouth looked very firm. Her hearer quite believed her.

"I should like to hear you and Dr. Kranz together," Miss MacLeod smiled.

"Oh! old Kranz and I are great friends. He knows he can't boss me so he doesn't try. I give him his orders; he was so taken aback the first day, I've held him there ever since." She held out a small decided looking hand and closed it. "I told him this morning I am off next week, and that before I go I will have two *sprudelstroms*, and if he won't mark it on the card I will. You know that is the bath when the water rushes in, fizzing all over you. They won't give you them unless you are pretty strong and can stand it, but I am."

"And you'll get your way of course."

"Of course. I always doctor myself at home and I know much better than old Kranz what is good for me."

"What an impossible patient!"

"Ah! but I am only a possible impatient, and I'm here for fun, that's all."

"Well, I told the doctor too that I shall go home end of next week, and that good boy says he'll stay and take me home. I feel I owe you—and Miss Merton, a debt of gratitude for going out with John sometimes, else I fear he would have had a very dull time here."

The other shook her head.

"And what about us? How well you have brought

him up, and that's why he has such nice manners, and thinks of all the little things that count for so much, but very few men do."

"But he was like that as a boy, it's natural to him and needed very little cultivation."

She looked at Lady Latimere and felt she could, without fear of being a bore, talk of her nephew, little knowing it was to the other's will she was responding.

"He and his sister are such a contrast; she is much more matter of fact and prosaic. Even when they were children it was John who always begged for fairy stories, and saw faces and pictures in the trees and the clouds. He is much more imaginative and idealistic than people think, as his outer life is very practical, and he is fond of sport and all out-door life. I often feel it's his temperament makes him a Liberal in politics——"

"Oh, is he? I should never have thought it."

"If you say that to him, he will chaff you and say that's because he wears clean shirts and collars, and has some semblance of a gentleman, and so can't be a radical."

"So few are, I suppose that is the reason one takes it for granted they are like oneself."

"Which shows you are a Conservative like me," smiled Miss MacLeod. "I tell John it's quite an honourable part to play drag on the wheels, but he says the coach often goes too slow and then it gets overloaded."

"So I am safe with you anyhow. I don't really care for politics, I've never had much to do with

them. Latimere only goes to the Lords when they whip up the lame, the halt and the blind, and he's all anyhow in his ideas." A little laugh rippled out. "To hear him talk he might be a Socialist sometimes, and he goes for all parties in turn."

"And votes like a good Tory I expect."

"I'm not so sure sometimes, but the only thing he really cares about is the Navy, and as long as they build lots of ships and get men for them he says nothing else really matters."

"Which shows he must have kept the simple soul of a sailor, and likes a straight issue."

"Yes, that's him all over. You must all meet at home sometime." She paused, and her mind reverted to John and his politics. "Sir John isn't in Parliament though?"

"No, not yet, they want him to stand but so far he has refused. He has a lot of county work, and he looks after the property in a very thorough way; in many ways I think he has enough irons in the fire with all his interests and tastes. Too little work rusts the soul, and too much work clogs it, though of the two evils the latter is the least I suppose. Of course my wish for him is he will marry before long, but though he is so fond of home life he isn't easily attracted by women, and he doesn't care at all for girls, so meanwhile there does not seem much chance of it."

"How tiresome men are. Those who ought to marry won't, and all the younger sons and penniless curates do before they are five and twenty, and have stacks of children." Lady Latimere looked at Miss

MacLeod and shot an arrow at random; "but Sir John is neither shy nor *farouche*, and I am sure he is not a woman hater, it's just he has not met the right woman yet."

The temptation was strong to confide the truth, without mentioning a name, to her hearer, but somehow she hesitated. It was John's secret, not her's, and to give it away without his knowledge was not quite fair, so the moment passed on with its fellows, and unknown to either of these two that summer afternoon, a big milestone in all their lives passed by unnoticed.

Miss MacLeod was silent for the space of her decision, and the face near her was interested and sympathetic.

"After all he is only thirty-two so I need not despair of him yet. When one's own years mount up one is apt to get in a hurry and one ought to have learnt patience and faith. It would be such a pity if he did not marry and have a son as the property is entailed and the heir to it all and the old name is a very distant and rather objectionable cousin, and it's gone from father to son, or brother to brother for nearly three hundred years. Then, too, there is always the fear that if the right woman, as you call her, does not marry him, the wrong one may come into his life, and like all high-strung, fine-fibred natures he could feel and suffer deeply. You know when one has brought some one up from a child, one longs to shield them always. It's quite wrong, as no one is much use until they suffer, unless they love very deeply, that is the best teacher of all," the

gentle voice dropped a little. Lady Latimere was listening with her child's expression.

"It must be much harder for men to marry than women, especially when they are young and good-looking and well-off, and he has you and his sister to make a nice home for him. He's only got one thing to gain—love, and it might be difficult to be quite sure if it's the real thing and good enough to last. Now women have lots of reasons to marry for, to get a home of their own, or so-called independence, a position or money or because it's supposed to be the right thing to do, and I believe lots do it from curiosity."

She was still wondering if Sir John cared for anyone, but from the way his aunt spoke, she gathered that she knew nothing. Ah, the dangers of speech! Had Miss MacLeod kept silent, the secret would soon have been out.

"There he comes," and the older woman pointed to a long grey figure coming down the Terrace. "We won't tell him we've been discussing marriage. The more one wants something for other people the less does it do to talk about it."

"None the worse of last night, I hope." John Douglas drew up a chair.

"On the contrary, one is never so well as when one is thoroughly amused and interested."

There was almost a touch of colour in the alabaster skin and her eyes were like greenstone.

"I haven't seen Miss Merton," she added, "she sent me a note to say she was all right but resting, and would look in this evening."

John turned to his aunt. "To-morrow I must take you for an outing, to Friedberg. We'll drive and have tea there and walk about the old Castle gardens. Perhaps you and Miss Merton would come too, and then if you are energetic enough we might walk home, and Miss Merton drive back with my aunt."

"An excellent plan," Lady Latimere said, and Miss MacLeod nodded assent.

"I've just met old Kranz so I stopped him and asked about your going home. He wriggled a bit, mostly with impatience at being buttonholed. He says you can go if you promise to be very quiet at home, do no work this summer, and return here next year."

"Sufficient unto the day is the *good* thereof," his aunt smiled.

"So we'll all be going about the same time. I'm glad as I should be so dull without you two now," Lady Latimere looked from one to the other. "I shall go by Paris and spend a few days there."

"And we by Cologne and break the journey there and so quietly to London."

Lady Latimere's eyes were following a large bumble bee. When it flew away she turned on John and suggested settling up.

Whereupon followed a hot encounter to which Miss MacLeod listened amused.

He would have none of it, it was his suggestion, his outing. Lady Latimere finally stamped a small foot and declared she would never go out with him again. At last a compromise was hit on. She should

pay for her and Miss Merton's dinner and their opera tickets.

The discussion was just ended and the debt settled when Miss Merton joined the group.

"You all looked very animated in the distance, and you, Laura, still look rather stormy," she said after exchanging greetings. Miss MacLeod laughed.

"These two have had a set to over last night's accounts, but a compromise and peace have been reached."

"But I——" began Miss Merton.

"Now, Agnes, for goodness sake, don't you start," broke in Lady Latimere, "it's done and finished with, and no one owes anyone anything."

"I beg your pardon I owe you two ladies a thoroughly delightful evening."

"And we owe you the same," replied Miss Merton.

"Well, now if you have all quite stopped squabbling and pretty speech-making I think it is time to be going home," said Miss MacLeod in her soft voice.

At Lady Latimere's gate they all stopped. John had had no word alone with her, there was something aloof about her to-day.

"Are you going in now?" he asked, "or will you come for a turn?"

She shook her head. There was a curious smouldering look in her eyes.

"Thanks, but Miss Merton is coming in with me."

"To make music?"

"Perhaps, if she is not tired, but only to practice, and strictly private."

"He would be a bold man who entered your door,

my lady, without permission," his voice had a steely tone, and he felt they were mentally fencing. "Good-bye, and if it still smiles on you to-morrow my aunt will be delighted to drive you and Miss Merton to Friedberg, in which case I shall meet you all there."

He turned back to Miss MacLeod, offered her his arm, and they walked slowly up the hill.

"Come on, Agnes, I want to sing, or are you tired?"

"Not a bit. I should love it; I've been resting all afternoon. Music like last night sets all one's own little chords vibrating."

"Yes, and then it needs blood letting. I sent Sir John away on purpose as I wish to sing to please myself, and it bores me when I feel he's analysing me or my moods."

"H'm! he may bore you, but it's evident you don't bore him."

"What do you mean?" quickly.

For answer Miss Merton pointed to the print of the Lorelei that lay extended on the piano, and put her finger on the man in the boat.

"Don't be an idiot," Lady Latimere spoke sharply, "or vulgar, which is worse." She had come to know Agnes Merton much more intimately these last two weeks, and said what she pleased to her.

"I hope I am neither, but any one with half an eye can see that you have swept the poor man into the whirlpool of your song."

"Nonsense! but if it's the songs he'll soon recover, and he shan't hear any more;" she shut the long window on to the balcony.

For half an hour she sang till Agnes Merton wondered what was going on behind those enigmatic eyes, certainly even she had never heard such an opening of the sluice gates of feeling and pathos before, but wisely she made no comment.

"I can't help who hears you or not, I must have some air. The atmosphere is getting sultry in here," she opened the window wide.

Meanwhile John Douglas had spun up the hill to Johannisberg, and when he returned forty minutes later, at the corner of the road where a turn to the right led to his villa, he heard her voice distinctly. It floated up towards him and he felt the call with a wild insistence echoing down into his own depths. He did not know what she meant by practising, but he was certainly being practised on. He hesitated a moment, and turned down his own road. He would bide his time. Something within told him she would only show her inner self—if any—to one who was master of himself and therefore not her slave, but he understood the rowers of old who put wool in their ears not to hear the song of the Sirens.

The great plain stretched far below the battlemented gardens of the old Castle of Friedberg. Green and gold it glittered in the afternoon sun, and the pollarded walk along the upper terrace was dark and cool in contrast. Miss MacLeod and Miss Merton sat in the arbour at one end; the walk up from the gate having been exercise enough that hot day for the real Nauheim patients. John persuaded Lady Lati-

mere to come right round the terrace to the high tower at the north end.

She was all smiles and friendliness, her eyes and voice were soft like the June breeze that flittered round them. He was getting used to watching the moods that chased each other like summer clouds across her sky, but they were as impossible to predict as the colours in a kaleidoscope. It was the unexpected that made her such a fascinating study.

She was leaning against the parapet, and he stood slightly to one side facing the plain. She had asked him the history of the old Castle, and he had outlined it to her.

"It's so nice being told things without the trouble of looking them out for oneself, it was the only way my poor governesses could ever teach me any history, by making stories of it to me. I can remember things I'm told like that."

"If you like having stories told you I'll tell you one of the Lorelei I picked up here in a book the other day, and you'll remember it when you look at her picture. Long ago the Lorelei rock was haunted by a lovely woman with a wonderful voice. Sometimes she was seen but often she was only heard, and lured on by her singing lots of fishermen in their boats were caught in the whirlpool close under her rock and wrecked.

"At one time a certain Pfalzgraf Albrecht reigned in that part of the Rhineland. His eldest son was a wild youth whose chief pleasure was to hunt everything wild and unobtainable. Fired by all the tales of the Lorelei's beauty and singing he set off deter-

mined to find and if possible to capture her. He and his men rowed down the river and when close to the rock the boatmen suddenly saw her. They implored the prince to go no further, but the sight of her beauty as she sat making a garland of water lilies for her hair, and the witchery of her voice maddened him, and he ordered the men to row him nearer the crags. As they approached the Lorelei beckoned with her most luring smile and the prince jumped from the boat the quicker to reach her. But the current caught him and dragged him out of sight. The rowers heard a sound, half laugh half sob from the rock overhead, but the Lorelei figure had disappeared.

"After waiting to make sure there was no sign of the prince the men hurried back to the Pfalzgraf's castle and told him what had happened. He ordered them to return at once and take the Lorelei and drown her in her own whirlpool. So they went back and in the dawn they reached the rock. The captain and two of his men scaled on to the heights, and there close above them was the Lorelei, smiling and holding a necklace of amber in her hand. She asked them what they wanted and when she heard it was herself and that they proposed to drown her, she turned round three times, threw the amber down into the river and sang in tones that made their blood go cold,

"'Send snow-white horses to thy child,
O Rhine, my father dear,
And see that they be swift and wild
To bear me far from here.'

In an instant an awful storm got up, thunder and lightning and rain and hail, the spray rose feet high

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into the air and shaped itself into two white horses; the Lorelei sprang on their backs and disappeared with them into the waters. At once all was calm and bright again, and the men when they recovered from their shock knew they were helpless, and that the Lorelei belonged neither to earth nor to water, but must be a mermaid and beyond mortal power.

"Just as they were turning away another surprise met them in the shape of the young prince. He had been washed ashore in a backwater and had recovered life and consciousness. Whether the end of his pursuit of the Lorelei cured his passion the story did not say. Since then the siren has hardly been seen but when the fishing boats pass her rock and the fishermen call to each other a lovely voice echoes back high above them. So you see the Lorelei still haunts her rock, and I expect whoever hears her never forgets the spell of her song."

John looked hard at his companion, but he could only see her profile; the likeness to the Lorelei picture was more marked than ever.

"How nicely you tell stories. I am not sure though that the prince ought to have come back to life," she said.

"Ah, you would take full toll every time?"

"I?" her eyes narrowed. "We are talking of the Lorelei. I call it a very unsatisfactory ending, either he ought to have been drowned, or we ought to know what happened afterwards."

"But it's much more like life not to have it all rounded off. It's left to the imagination of each reader or listener to finish it according to their own

ideas and feelings. Now you tell me your ending, and then I'll tell mine."

Her eyes went dreaming out over the plain. She had turned round, and sat sideways on the parapet. "I think," she spoke slowly, "that before long he was back at the rock listening and looking for her, and when he heard her without seeing her, he tried to climb up, and slipped and fell back into the river and was really drowned."

"Very good, and quite the right ending for a fairy sorceress story. Mine is more prosaic, as to me there is something more than fairy tale in it. I believe he went back to his father's castle, thoroughly frightened at himself, and what can happen if self-control goes to the winds, that he married a nice comfortable German princess, with flaxen hair and blue eyes and square hips, and they had a lot of little princelings and princesslings. But," he paused, Lady Latimere had her most questioning look, "he never trusted himself to go near the rock again, and he never forgot."

She looked away to the plain and smiled. "Yours is most like life."

"Aren't you a little sorry for the Lorelei? It must be a tragic fate only to be loved and never to love, to receive and never to give." Parables are useful things sometimes, thought John.

"That is a man's point of view. I expect she was bored at all these silly creatures slobbering and drowning at her feet, and if one had sailed up and down, paying no attention to her she would have liked him."

"So that is the way Loreleis are to be treated, but I expect as soon as he did pay attention, she'd have classed him with the rest and down he'd go. It wouldn't have been much use if he had gone on sailing up and down indefinitely, ignoring her, unless he wasn't under her spell, and that would have so angered the Lorelei she'd have drowned him for such daring, so I think it was heads she won and tails he lost."

"You think she had no heart?"

"I don't know. That is what I want you to tell me. You have her face and her voice, my lady, you should know better than I." He moved a step back, there was a quizzical look in his face. The stalk after his quest had come quicker than he expected, he was too near the quarry to show the flicker of an eyelid.

"Poor Lorelei! I don't like to give my double away, or myself either, you must take us as you find us, Sir Inquisitor, and don't be too much of a botanist. You might find we grow without any roots and are outside usual laws."

She was smiling and there was no change in her manner, but the man knew the quarry had given him the slip, and he was left baffled on an empty hillside.

She touched his arm.

"Come along and we'll take the invalids to tea at your restaurant."

An hour after, these two were walking back along the fruit laden road that lies between Friedberg and Nauheim, having despatched their companions home in the carriage.

Silence lay between them, that silence more pregnant and charged with meaning than any speech. How few realise the meaning of the first silence that falls between two beings nearing each other. How heavy with portent it is, for the first one determines for ever the quality of all silences that follow. It is not words that show us to each other, it is silence, and if the first be not harmonious, it is that one soul of the two is fighting the other in the darkness, either because it is antipathetic, or because it fears the other's silence, and what stands to be revealed. If, on the other hand, the silence is mutually of the same quality the feelers of the soul will draw towards each other, and the great unspoken, unavoidable things of life will spring forth from their hidden places like flowers that open by night, for silence is the great revealer, and the quality of the first silence abides for ever, to unite, or to divide, to attract or to repel.

Like all people fond of solitude John Douglas had powers of sympathetic silence, not for lack of speech but for love of stillness.

He felt himself holding back from words purposely, groping in the silent caves of thought for the furtherance of his quest. There was a hush in the evening air, that stillness that heralds the silence of the night, and it laid its touch on them.

Now and again he glanced at the small figure by his side. He was watching for a sign of her inner thought, but it should come of her own free will, and not in response to his lead. His mind and will were on her, but carefully veiled from her sight.

Apparently she was quite content not to talk, surprisingly so, and there was no effort in their silence. What he could see of her face under the wide brimmed hat was grave but that was her usual expression in repose. He saw her suddenly look up at him, a little smile crept up into the eyes and touched the corners of the lips. His own answered, and he knew this elusive creature had come nearer to him again, speech bubbled up for a moment but he drove it back, if she wanted such she could summon it. But no word came and the power of her silence was a further revelation of her varying moods, and argued unknown depths.

By accident her foot turned on a stone, she stumbled forwards. He caught her arm.

"You aren't hurt I hope?"

"There, now you've lost the game, but it's come to an end much too soon. I wanted to walk home without either of us speaking," she was walking on. "Oh, no, my foot is all right, bother that stone! Were you wondering if I wasn't going to speak?" she looked amused.

"I was hoping you weren't going to, and I knew I shouldn't till you did."

"It's no use starting again now, it's only nice when the other person doesn't know one is playing a game."

"Do you often play it?"

"No, because there are so few people who you can play it with for more than five seconds. You were splendid. It's such a mercy to find some one who doesn't want to chatter all the time."

"But it's only when one is quiet with some one one finds out anything about them." He watched her quietly.

"And the result of our twenty minutes' walk is——"

"That you are the most silent woman talker I've ever met. The power of song coupled with the power of silence is a strong combination you know." He feared to become too personal, or she would be off up her Lorelei rock like lightning; he had long since discovered that peculiarity. Treat her as if she were wood or stone she stayed easily by your side, touch her however lightly, and she eluded you at once. The question rose, was this her nature, or was she merely elusive to provoke pursuit, or to escape capture, or because she was impatient of close attention? All this John Douglas was trying to find out, but it was like chasing the end of a rainbow. To-day, however, she was more approachable than he had yet seen her.

She laughed softly but said nothing.

"You'll remember our Tristan tryst, perhaps the week after next, if it's given; you and Jean and I."

She nodded.

"I shall be in London most of that week, and I know the Friday is the Portsdowns' ball."

"I believe I am booked to take Jean to that."

"I'm sure you don't often go to London balls."

"Oh, now and again when my friends are kind enough to ask me, and I know there'll be a good floor and good music, and two or three good dancers.

I love dancing, don't you?" he was extraordinarily boyish at times.

"Yes, but not in a crowd."

"But if one goes late to a London ball and stays on, that's the time. We ought to have gone down to some of the dancing evenings they have in the Kursaal here, lots of room and a capital looking floor. I looked in one evening but I hadn't the courage to walk up to a lady and ask for a turn, besides an unknown Germany quantity might be risky —in weight if in nothing else."

"Well, I shall wait till the Portsdown ball, though a *deuxtemps* with a smart young officer would be quite good exercise, and much more amusing than being bounced about by fumble-footed boys like one often is at home."

John Douglas suddenly made up his mind she should come and dance with him.

"There's a dance to-morrow evening, do come down with Miss Merton, and look on even if you don't want to dance. I know it would amuse you both." Wary John.

Sure enough the next evening the three were in the big room of the Kursaal. A few couples were waltzing to that wonderful "Wein Weib und Gesang" of Strauss.

"I see no officer to present to you, but won't you give a Scottish yeoman a trial? We can't stand still to this music."

"Agnes, I'm going to have one turn," Miss Merton was already sitting down.

"Yes, do, and I shall watch you. Luckily, I've

never cared for dancing so it's no deprivation not to be able to."

Lady Latimere turned back to John.

"Only a short turn," but the moment they slid off together she knew she was in the hands of a master of the art, and the rhythm of music and movement re-echoed in her.

She was light and smooth on her feet, and his strong arm could have piloted her through any crowd. In this big empty room they seemed to float round. Every now and then to ease her he went back a few steps or reversed. Not a word passed between them, but the perfect sympathy of movement was guerdon enough. John Douglas had all the passionate love of dancing innate in so many Scots, and he let it have full swing. A faint scent of flowers seemed to mount to his head with the music, and the sensuous lilt of a Strauss waltz is more dangerous to dancers and music lovers than anything else on earth.

It was their third round of the room, and gradually he held her closer to him. His own feet were on wings and he could have gone on for hours with this light burden in his arms, the beautiful outline of the face so close, the dark glossy head just reaching to his shoulder. He bent his head to hers for a moment.

"Are you getting tired? Shall I stop?"

"No, I am all right for once more round the room. Stop when you get to Agnes."

She felt his arm tighten, how wonderfully he danced, she thought, and a smile touched her face. They were on the opposite side from Miss Merton, he reversed twice, almost lifting her off the ground

and then stopped, his arm still round her to steady her. She was very white and a little out of breath. He too was paler and his grey eyes looked dark, like sapphires at night.

"Thank you, my lady. I stopped here as I thought you must have had enough. After you've rested a minute we can finish at Miss Merton."

Of course he had stopped where there was no third person.

"You are a good mount."

He bowed. "The rider has a good deal to do with the way a horse goes, especially if he is to stay. How they play; it gets into one, doesn't it?" but he knew something else besides the music had got into him. She was sitting and he stood beside her. Every sense in him moved towards her, and as long as he showed nothing of the tumult within to frighten her away, for this one evening he would allow the spell full play. To his mind there was little in life worth having without paying a reckoning after, as long as it was to his account only, what matter.

"Come," he said quietly, he held out his hand, "and I'll land you at Miss Merton."

"Shan't we walk round?" For answer his arm went round her waist, and she felt herself swept out on the music's tide. But he stopped as he said. John Douglas knew the value of the reserve, even in small things, and he meant to dance with her again.

"It made even me want to dance to watch you two," she smiled up at them.

"Yes, Sir John is quite good, and the floor and the music, too."

"And the lady, so we are all pleased with each other."

A polka came next, and the three sat and watched two or three ponderous couples jigging up and down. Another waltz, this time a well-known French one.

"I can't let you go home without one turn at this. I'm sure Miss Merton won't mind waiting a few minutes." The two women had shown signs of departure.

"Think how good this exercise is for us," he insisted. She stood up beside him.

"Not for long though."

"I couldn't let you say no this time," his voice was low in her ear as they glided away.

A curious sense of floating into space came over her, so smooth and silent their movements were, so strong the support that guided her. As for John he was unconscious of anything except the fact that he held this elusive creature near him, and that for a few minutes she had to obey his behest and go whither he led her. She was too fine strung not to be aware that this was no ordinary dancing, and her sense of fair play called halt.

"I think we'll stop now," she said in her quiet way. Her partner paid no heed, if indeed he heard. He went slower, swung her round the reverse way; she was so light he could turn and twist her as he pleased.

"Must we stop?" he felt he could have gone on for ever, insensibly he drew her so close that the roses in her dress were crushed. Dancer as he was, such a waltz was a revelation to him, music, rhythm

and this woman, all were blended in one delirious sweetness. He was like someone with strong drink at his lips, who knew the next gulp would make him drunk.

"Yes, please," the voice reached him; by a strong effort of will he stopped, landing her into the chair beside her friend. The latter's quick eyes thought he looked a little dazed, and she made some trivial remark.

"Now we must have some cool drink on the Terrace," he led the way out.

He was grateful for Miss Merton's presence with its light friendly touch, at that moment silence would have been too dangerous, speech for once more so, and ordinary talk almost impossible.

Had his partner guessed anything? He devoutly hoped not. A quick glance at the cameo face reassured him, and there was not a flicker of self-consciousness in the eyes that met his smiling across the small marble-topped table. Something almost elfin in the expression set him wondering whether she was child or woman, or sprite.

Shortly after he escorted them to their respective houses, and thus ended John Douglas' first dance with Laura Latimere.

For the remaining days he spent some of each with her. Sometimes she was friendly and intimate, sometimes aloof and distant, but whatever mood played on her, the spell was the same, and John Douglas' boat had got far out to sea.

In talk they touched on many subjects, politics, religion, books, and sometimes on love and marriage,

but on these latter only in a general way; or they entered the kingdom of silence, as easily and naturally as the first time, and here it was he felt to gain glimpses now and again of his quest.

He hid it all carefully from his aunt's loving and watchful eyes, only now and again she thought he seemed restless, and was glad the home going was so near.

The last day but one he went for a long walk, and on his return found she had been to tea with Lady Latimere, who had sung to her for an hour.

"It did not frighten me a bit to-day, and she sang just the sort of things I like best."

He did not tell her that all these last days he had listened to that singing, but unknown to the singer or to her accompanist, from a vantage point under a shady tree in the garden, out of sight of the balcony window.

Miss MacLeod and he left Nauheim two days later in the afternoon. Lady Latimere and Miss Merton went to the station to bid them goodbye.

"Au revoir, my Lady Lorelei," he had said as his aunt and Miss Merton were bidding each other farewell. "Thank you for many things. We meet at Philippi," he stood bareheaded before her and held her hand a trifle longer than the usual handshake. Her face was grave but her strange eyes were light.

"I will let you know when I get to London," was all she said. A few minutes later the train had started. Lady Latimere and her companion went back up the hill to prepare for their own departure on the following day.

Later that evening a slight white figure sat on the balcony and looked out over the sleeping town. Her face was sad and the eyes were pensive, but a slightly scornful look was on the beautiful mouth.

"He's rather a dear but I do hope he is not going to be tiresome, if only people would understand. I can't help it and I don't mean to. 'We are as we are made and we can't 'elp ourselves' as old Nan used to say," ran the gist of her thoughts. It might have helped to solve John Douglas' quest could he have known.

Far away a train sped on its iron way, and a face looked from its windows on the moon-struck Rhine.

"Und das hat mit ihrem Singen
Die Lorelei gethan,"

the thundering wheels sang as they tore northwards past the Lorelei rock.

CHAPTER V

THE WHIRLPOOL

ON the Friday evening that Miss MacLeod and her nephew left Nauheim, Mrs. Errington sat writing letters in the reading room of her London club. A page boy came in and handed her a written telephone message. It was from Jean Douglas asking her to come that evening and dine alone with her, adding that Miss MacLeod and Sir John Douglas were returning from Germany late on Saturday evening, as they were now coming straight through.

"Wait a moment," she quickly wrote something on a half sheet. "Will you telephone this at once, please."

She would go. She was very fond of Jean Douglas; it was a chance of seeing her in a pleasant quiet way in the hurly burly of a week in London.

How much Jean guessed of John Douglas' feelings towards herself, Mrs. Errington did not know. The subject had never been mentioned between the two women, and judging from the reserve of brother and sister towards each other on most deep and intimate subjects despite their devotion, she presumed he did not confide such things to the matter of fact Jean.

Mrs. Errington sighed as she gathered up a bundle of letters and correspondence. She was so fond of John Douglas. His friendship and companionship had been a great help and support in her desolated life with its many duties and responsibilities, to all of which she had had to adapt herself after Harry Errington's death. These two had been all in all to each other, and the shock of his loss had touched the very mainspring of her young life. Had it not been for the boy, but a baby of one year old when his father died, she would hardly have faced life in the brave way she did, but Mary Errington had a steel centre to her sweet gentle nature, and though it had been bent nearly to breaking point, it had regained its straight strength. She thought of all she owed the Douglas family. It was the brother and sister and Miss MacLeod who had held her hand closest in the first dark days, and had led her from step to step. Harry Errington had been more like a younger brother than a cousin to John, and he and Jean had frequently stayed for long visits at Barham both before and after his marriage.

Now the sun was bright on her path again and she faced the world and her fellow creatures with glad courage. She missed John Douglas' visible friendship, yet in common fairness to him she could not encourage his visits or even his letters, since he had passed the bounds of their old standing. She would have given all she possessed that he should not have cared for her; somehow the very unfairness seemed so great. He had everything to give, and she had nothing left. Even if she could get over the repug-

nance of re-marriage, even down to changing her name, the gulf between her and this man would be too great, she could not take so much and give so little.

If only he had had a love story or romance in his life as she had, she might some day have got so far as thinking about it, but as it was—never. All this she had told him, as gently as she could, and when he tried to argue it out with her she could only shake her head. And she was sorry. She hated giving pain; she was so unselfish that her whole bent was to live for others rather than herself.

So she had cut adrift from this strong friendship, and since he had last spoken to her of his love and asked her to marry him, four months ago (for the second time within a year), she had neither seen, nor written to him. Her hope was he might forget, or meet some other woman who would care for him, and whom he would marry.

There was nothing of the dog in the manger about Mary Errington.

Her beautiful eyes were sad at their own reflection as she stood before her looking-glass dressing for dinner. Such peculiar coloured eyes they were, too. Once when fishing a burn near Raeford John had pointed to a pool into which the sunlight painted light green shadows among the onyx waters and had said:

"Do you see that green and brown pool; it's exactly like your eyes;" she had laughed and veiled them with the long dark lashes.

Her black evening dress showed off the whiteness

of her neck. Her hair, almost black, with the dark fringed green eyes and soft complexion, made her colouring very distinctive. She was something more indefinable than pretty, and her high-bred look and singularly sweet expression gave her face a power and beauty often lacking in many so-called good-looking women.

By nine o'clock she and Jean Douglas had finished dinner, and were sitting in the cool back drawing-room of Miss MacLeod's charming house. It was fragrant with flowers that Jean had brought up from Raeford the day before, to greet the travellers. She had given Mrs. Errington all she knew of the Nauheim news, and how the present plan was that Miss MacLeod, after two or three days' rest in London was going down to stay a week or ten days at Malvern with her old friend Mrs. Johnstone. That would be quite a good after-cure; she would then join John and her at Raeford. They, meanwhile, would remain the ten days in London.

The two were sitting on a large sofa close to the open window. They made a good foil to each other. Jean Douglas' fairness was in startling contrast to the other's almost southern colouring. In features she was like her brother, but where his hair was brown, hers was golden, and instead of grey eyes hers were dark brilliant blue. Her long slight figure was all in white, and a narrow black velvet round her throat set off the transparency of her complexion. She was undoubtedly good-looking, but there was a touch of hardness in the face, and the lines of mouth and chin were almost masculine in their firmness.

"You remember you've promised to come to the Portsdown ball; it's next Friday."

Mary Errington made a little face.

"I don't want to, now it's so near. I haven't been to a London ball since before—the war, and I funk."

"Rubbish! John and I will look after you," Jean's voice was brisk; her idea of helping lame dogs over stiles was to hustle them. The system with Mary Errington had often succeeded admirably. She smiled inwardly, recognising Jean's strong but well-meant touch.

"The only thing is you won't mind if I come a bit late to fetch you. I've heard from John to-night telling me to get a box for Tristan next week, whichever night it's given. He is taking Lady Latimere to it, and wants me to go, too. I found out from the box office to-day it's Friday, but we'd be out by 11.30."

"By which time I shall be in bed and asleep." Mrs. Errington's pretty mouth smiled and her very short upper lip nearly disappeared.

"Very well then, I shall come away so as to be with you by eleven."

"What! leave the opera and a guest you don't know?"

"She isn't my guest but John's, and as apparently they have met most days for three weeks or more they must be quite at home with each other. You are not going to slip through my hands like that."

"Well, really I think you overshoot the mark. You are going to leave an opera you love, and an unknown guest, and all to take an elderly female to

a ball she doesn't want to go to. You will have to see too what John says."

"You've got to make your début in London again, and this is a very good chance. John will probably be delighted, as he'll want to encourage you to go to the ball," (her companion wondered) "and he'll be quite happy with his new friend." She stopped a moment. "Do you know this Lady Latimere?"

"No, but I've often heard of her, and know lots of people who do. I believe she is a very fascinating person, and sings beautifully."

"Marny seems to be captured by her, and wants me to meet her, says I'd like playing for her. Poor woman! for accompanying is not my strong point. It will be nice to see dear old Marny again." Jean's face and voice softened. "You must come and see her. Only before she went abroad she was saying she sees so little of you. You are to come to Raeford this summer or autumn and bring Hal."

Mary Errington looked out of the window, away from those bright blue eyes.

"Yes, I'd like to, and must try and fit it in." She felt sure now Jean did not know the reason of her recent aloofness, and she was thankful. "I'll come to tea with Marny on Sunday, unless she's too tired, if so you can telephone and tell me what other hour will suit, but I'm engaged for luncheon and dinner Monday and Tuesday." She wasn't, but she was less likely to meet John at tea-time.

They talked on for a little, and at ten Mrs. Errington got up to go.

"My dear Jean, you've grown, or I've shrunk."

She was of medium height, but Jean Douglas towered over her.

"That shows how long it is since you've seen me, and I've got on a new pair of idiotically high-heeled shoes. Now, mind, on Friday night at eleven sharp you are ready dressed, and all your gee-gaws on, and no shirking."

She went down with her guest and put her into a waiting taxi.

"How I wish John would marry her," thought Jean to her blind self as she went upstairs, which showed she was not within the inner circle of the family.

* * * * * *

On Sunday night the trio sat at dinner; it was the first meal at which they had all met since the two travellers' return.

Miss MacLeod had rested all Sunday, and had only come down at tea-time to see Mrs. Errington. John Douglas had spent most of the day out, partly with Jean, and partly by himself.

"Which day are you going to Malvern, dear?" asked Jean of her aunt.

"Tuesday, and I shall hope to be back here on Thursday week and join you and John at home on the Saturday if you have got tired of waiting here." Miss MacLeod looked wonderfully fresh, and her pink and white complexion was as clear as a girl's.

"I must say you do Nauheim, or Kranz or John credit." There was always a softened note in Jean's voice when she talked to or of her aunt.

"Nauheim, and me, please. She's well in spite of

Kranz, not because of him. He'd have driven you raving, you ask Marie about him." Her brother helped himself to a glass of port and raised it to Miss MacLeod.

"The only punishment for such base ingratitude to that poor man and all he did for me, is that some day you may have to be doctored by him," she smiled in response.

"What a pity you were out when Mary came today," Jean broke in. "She is looking so well and pretty and smart. I think I've got her safe for the Portsdown ball on Friday, and you will have to look after her and take her to supper and see she knows plenty of people," Jean babbled on. Miss MacLeod busied herself over a peach.

John nodded, and inwardly wished Jean had not been so insistent on going to the ball, or of making Mary Errington do so.

"We shan't get there till near twelve you know. By the way, which box have you got?"

"The one on the grand tier, right in the middle of the house, opposite the stage."

"Perfect!"

"I shall come away before the last act, and go and fetch Mary. I daren't trust her after eleven, or she'll go to bed." Jean spoke very decidedly as she always did if she thought her brother would oppose her plans.

"All right, we'll have a motor for the night and it can take you and Mary to the ball and come back to the opera. Lady Latimere is going to that ball, too, I believe, so it will all fit in quite easily.

"I wonder when she gets back," said Miss MacLeod.

"From what she said, not before Wednesday or Thursday I should think, but as she has many and varied plans, mostly hatched and carried out at a moment's notice, she may be here sooner. Will you write her a note, Jean? 1, Grosvenor Street, I think, is the address; it's her father's house—Herbert's the name, and you can look it up to make sure of the number; ask her to dine here 6.15 on Friday night, and say we've got a box for Tristan. She must eat somewhere, and this is as near the opera as where she will be staying; besides you and she will make acquaintance easier over soup and chicken than in a dark box. Put on it 'to await arrival' and show you expect an answer, as she is rather vague."

"But you might do all this. I don't know the woman."

"It's only because you'll be hostess that night as Marny will be away, and it would be polite. I'll send her a line too." He looked at his aunt with a look of appeal.

"Certainly, of course, Jean will, and tell her how sorry I am to miss her."

After dinner Miss MacLeod rested on the sofa by the open window in the long drawing-room. Jean went to the piano. She played softly, quiet restful music, adapted hymn tunes and sacred songs. Miss MacLeod was old-fashioned and adhered to her Scottish upbringing in only liking Sunday music. John and Jean would tell her all good music was such,

but that all Sunday music was not good, but she held to her own views on the subject.

John Douglas sat in a deep armchair with a book. Something in his face struck his aunt as clouded. He had been rather quiet towards the end of dinner, perhaps it was the talk of Mary Errington and the ball. But it wasn't, at least not as Miss MacLeod thought.

Tuesday came, and John saw his aunt off to Malvern, the grim Marie in close attendance.

On his way back from Paddington he stopped at Grosvenor Street. The door was answered by a respectable housekeeper-looking woman. The house was evidently *en papillotes*.

"Has Lady Latimere returned from abroad yet? I saw her in Germany last week, and am expecting to hear from her on her return."

The intense respectability of black silk and a cameo brooch made him feel he must present some credentials for such pertinent enquiries.

"No, sir. 'er ladyship is expected to-morrow evening."

"Thank you. Will you kindly give her these when she arrives," he handed her Jean's note and both their cards.

The woman glanced at the latter.

"I will see 'er ladyship receives them," her pompous voice thawed a little. She was undoubtedly the family housekeeper.

So the next two days passed. A note came from Lady Latimere in answer to Jean's, accepting for Friday at 6.15 p.m.

Mrs. Errington was always engaged when Jean suggested luncheons or dinners at the Brook Street house, but she trysted the girl to several shopping exploits, or tea at her club. She made the excuse of being so short a time in London, with various people to see, when Jean badgered, and parried her in a deft way about not yet having seen John.

He, meanwhile, had spent most of Wednesday and Thursday out of London, motoring and golfing with one or two friends he had come across.

Friday morning he called at Mrs. Errington's club. He wanted to see her before the ball, to show her there should be no gêne between them, that he was well on his balance; not even to himself would he admit the lesson had been easier to learn since his visit abroad.

He was shown into the visitors' drawing-room. In a few minutes Mary Errington came in.

"How nice to see you again," she held out both hands; into her face crept the faintest rise of colour, but her manner was quite natural. John had never seen her look so well, nor so full of life.

"I thought I might ask to see you for five minutes, before you start out on your hurdy-gurdy round. Jean is getting quite cross at all your engagements. Also to make sure you are coming to-night."

"Oh, yes! I don't want to, but Jean will make such a fuss if I don't, so I'll come for an hour."

They had sat down on a big settee.

"It's tiresome this opera being the same night, but as I made the engagement with Lady Latimere three weeks ago I don't quite like to chuck it, and it's the

last time Tristan will be given this season, and she's so keen to go to it."

Had Lady Latimere heard this version she would have smiled her Lorelei smile.

"But it's all right, only that silly Jean insists on coming for me at eleven, and she'll miss the last act."

"Yes, but she's heard it lots of times, and she'll be much happier putting the finishing touches to you, Mary, and spinning you round and criticising! We know our Jean, don't we?" he was feeling more at his ease now.

It did not occur to him to suggest Mrs. Errington should come to the opera, too, or he did not allow it to occur. Luckily it never dawned on her it should be thought of.

They talked a little of Miss MacLeod, and the Nauheim time; he asked after Hal and various interests at Barham. He was more like his old friendly self than he had been for a year, and with that intuition which amounts to second sight in some women, Mary Errington felt something had happened to account for this. Either it was the result of her firm refusal, or her four months' silence, or it was his pride, or—he had met some one else. Somehow the last thought persisted. She wondered if she was glad; she would only answer that question when she knew who it was.

"You'll let me take you to supper to-night?" They were standing by the door, and he held her hand to say good-bye. "That isn't asking too much surely?" but he didn't say it as he would have done

four months ago. "I ask you now, as I shall be a bit late. I'll have to go to the club after the opera, as I see there is to be Royalty there to-night, so that means knee-breeches and baubles, rather a bore!"

"Very well, but if you are not there by 12.15 I am off home supperless."

John Douglas went on his way, and sauntered into Bond Street. The day was hot with a pleasant breeze. He had stopped a moment to look at a picture shop window, his memory going back to the Frankfort one, when he felt a light poke in his back. Turning quickly he found himself face to face with Lady Latimere. She looked charmingly cool and fresh, the cherry coloured parasol which had made him turn, shedding a soft glow over the white face. He felt conscious of a quicker beat at this unexpected meeting.

"I saw you turn out of Grafton Street, but I should not have come up with you if you had not stopped. Tell me how is Miss MacLeod after her journey? I fear I have missed her."

"She went to Malvern on Tuesday, and she is wonderful, thank you."

They were walking slowly towards Oxford Street.

"You got back Wednesday evening? I hope Paris was nice. Your rather frigid housekeeper volunteered the information about your return when I left Jean's note for you."

"She told me a fair young gentleman called and asked for me on Tuesday, and as 'ow she 'oped she 'adn't been indiscreet, but as 'ow you looked like one of 'er Ladyship's friends," the voice mimicked the other one to the life. "Mrs. Smithers is a real old

Cerberus, but quite discriminating. She is the old butler's wife, but remains up here till end of July. My mother always says between the two of them she wonders any one ever gets in, either when he is on guard when it's full, or she when it's empty. Smithers usually bangs the door in a visitor's face, but it's a great merit."

"I am glad I passed muster. I tried to be as polite as I could," he said. "Now about to-night. I know you'll be punctual as you like being there while the tuning up is going on, and we mustn't miss a note of the overture. It's kind of you to come and dine but it's so close by we felt it wouldn't make your evening much longer. The motor shall be at your door at five minutes past six. I noticed you must be picnicking at your father's, so I hope you will let me send it to fetch you."

"Thank you, Sir Courier, you really have missed your vocation. I am looking forward so much to my evening out, and meeting your sister." She smiled up at him, and John saw she was in one of her accessible moods. They parted at the corner of Grosvenor Street.

That evening at six John Douglas was downstairs in the back sitting room, awaiting his guest.

Jean came in a few minutes later, radiant in gleaming white satin. A black aigrette and diamond clasp set off the glitter of her gold head, a deep pink rose in the front of her bodice the only touch of colour. John looked at her, and nodded his approval. She put her head on one side as she stood a few steps from him.

"You do look nice and smart. What a mercy it is to go about with a man who looks and dresses like a gentleman."

For a moment she placed both her hands on his shoulders.

"It is a pity you are my brother, for I never see any one I like as much as you."

"Good gracious, Jean, London heat must have turned your head," he laughed but his face softened; it was rarely his sister showed her devotion by outward word or sign.

"We'll have a dance to-night, nice and late when the room's emptier, and just show them how," he said touching her hand. His sister was a beautiful dancer and loved it as he did.

"Rather! What lovely buttons and links; new?"

She was now examining him in detail.

"Marny gave me them at Nauheim as a souvenir, or rather the extravagant old thing sent for a selection from Frankfort."

The waistcoat buttons and sleeve links were white enamel, studded with tiny diamonds.

"They go well with your pearl studs, too;" the latter had been Jean's gift to him at his coming of age eleven years before. It had been a joke that he must never have more than two stud-holes in his evening shirts, as her purse couldn't run to more than two good-sized pearls.

He certainly looked very well groomed and turned out in his evening clothes. They made a handsome pair standing there together as the door opened and Lady Latimere was announced. She came quickly

forward, her clinging dress of *eau de nil* and silver shimmering as she moved.

"We hardly need introducing, do we?" this in her friendliest tone. "I've heard so much of you from both your brother and Miss MacLeod. I am so sorry she is not here too to-night." She looked at John and gave him her left hand.

In a few minutes they were at dinner. John soon saw Jean was taking to the new family friend, and as with his aunt he knew he was glad.

It was the first time he had seen Lady Latimere in full evening toilette; attractive looking as he had hitherto thought her, to-night she was something more. The low-cut dress and short transparent sleeves showed a skin of dazzling white, the hair was parted in the middle, waving soft over the level brows, on each side diamond leaves garlanded the small classic head, and gave it a distinction which no conventional tiara of the fender type could have done.

She was more Lorelei like than ever.

She and Jean discussed music of all sorts and sundries, *artistes* and operas.

"I can't believe you've never been to Tristan," when she heard this would be Lady Latimere's introduction to it, "how I wish it could be my first time over again, though one loves it better every time. It's rather dreadful but I must come away before the third act. You won't mind I hope? Has John explained?" the other shook her head.

"Of course not. Men always leave the explaining to us. Well, I've persuaded our cousin, Mrs. Errington, to come to the Portsdown ball. She hasn't

been out in London, or anywhere almost since her husband died about six years ago—perhaps Marny or John have explained her to you?"

This time Lady Latimeré nodded, and her face went sympathetic, as some faces can.

"She's jibbing hard, and I daren't leave her beyond eleven, or she'll be off to bed."

"Of course you must go and herd her, I'll be all right with the courier, you know that's what I call him."

"The motor can fetch and carry for us all in turn, if you don't mind dropping me at the club on your way to the ball, and sending it back there for me."

"But you are coming on to the ball?"

"Oh, yes! but unfortunately it's breeches night, Royalty of some sort at the Portsdown's, and I really can't begin the night out at six dressed like a flunkey. So I'll do a lightning change at the club and come and join you all."

Punctually at seven they were in their places at Covent Garden. The box was a large one, and John drew his chair up between the two women, Lady Latimere being on his right.

The overture, presage of all that is to come, was nothing new to her; she had heard that many times before. It made her think of Nauheim too, and the fluttering trees, where she had heard it often, and the *Liebestrank* and the *Liebestod motifs* had haunted her since with their compelling music.

The Isolde that night was the one of dreams; tall, golden-haired, soulful, the profile of a Greek, the movements of a goddess. She bore the scrutiny of

strong opera glasses, and remained—Isolde. More so perhaps than Tristan, who, however, minus the glasses, made a lordly lover enough, with his crimson mantle and curling locks. Even in the first act the beauty and passion of their voices stirred two of their hearers in an unusual degree.

When the love potion began to work in the two lovers, and that gamut of human feeling rose through the violins, John Douglas glanced to his right. Lady Latimere sat slightly forward, her eyes wide, her mouth a little open as if she were breathing fast, her right hand on the ledge of the box looked clenched. She was drinking it all in as John had known she would. He could picture her as Isolde, so, too, would she sing and look and be if the potion of life should turn to love as it passed her lips, and his who should give it to her. He closed his eyes for a moment and felt a throb in his throat. Had he brought his small boat too near the rocks?

The curtain came down, the lights glared up, making those more sensitive than a jellyfish shield their eyes and shiver.

"How inartistic these English are," exclaimed Jean in an angry undertone. "It's unbearable to be shown up by Röntgen rays after scenes like that. Why can't they put their beastly lights up gradually if people must look at each other?"

"I've often suffered from it, too," Lady Latimere agreed. "If I'd a box of my own I'd have a small rod right across and a string, and the moment the curtain began to go down I'd pull my curtains."

John had got up, and was standing in the back of

the box. He didn't feel like talking somehow, and he was grateful to his sister for her matter of fact outburst.

"It is wonderful, isn't it," he heard her say, and he saw Lady Latimere's face as she answered quietly.

"I can't believe it isn't all real. I don't want to know their own names, they are just Tristan and Isolde, it's almost unbearable."

She must have a heart to look and speak like that, thought John, and for a moment his quest came back to him.

He had not spoken since the lights went up. Lady Latimere turned round to look at him; he was scanning the house through his glasses.

"It's the greatest of all the love tragedies," he said, in a slow voice, and he lowered the glasses and looked down on her. Her eyes had their most questioning look, as if they searched for something unfindable; they made him sadder than even Tristan and Isolde. He almost wished he had not brought her here; but there came back to him her lightning changes and varying moods, and the cloud lightened.

"I'm just going out to have a cigarette," and he disappeared.

He met several friends in the passages and *foyer*, but he was in no mood for conversation.

"Queer beggar, Douglas," said the man he had played golf with all the day before. "Out golfing or shooting or in the club he's as cheery as can be; meet him at an opera like this, or a serious play or music, and you won't get a word out of him."

"Probably in love; it takes 'em like that some-

times," rejoined his companion, who had but a nodding acquaintance with Douglas.

"Well, he's been like that ever since he was a kid."

"P'raps he's always in love."

"Keeps it pretty dark then, and you hardly ever see him with a woman. No, it's just his way." The two passed on, and the subject of their remarks threw away his cigarette and returned to the box.

Lady Latimere looked up and said: "I was just suggesting to your sister that if you two are going to grizzle in London next week, waiting for Miss MacLeod, you had much better come down to Hardene for a day or two. I believe Latimere will be back on Sunday. I'm going home to-morrow, so why not come down on Monday. I'd suggest your coming down to-morrow, but as I've been away six weeks, and there's a new cook and other horrors, it might be all anyhow; not that either of you would be critical I'm sure, but still——"

Jean looked at her brother.

"Isn't it kind of Lady Latimere, and it would be so nice."

"If you are sure we'd not be in the way so soon after you and Lord Latimere get home. I know what a bore visitors are before one gets turned round," but his voice told how much he wanted to say yes.

"Then that's settled. It's only a little over an hour by a fast train to Basingstoke, and you'll let me know which train you come by. I might try and get Agnes Merton and we'll make music, though I don't believe you can't accompany."

"She can accompany right enough if she knows the thing, but she can't read," said the candid brother.

"That's because she plays by heart and ear, I know. Hush, it's coming."

* * * * * *

There are no words in which to tell the love scene of Tristan and Isolde. Those who know it need no telling, those who do not would be none the wiser.

It is not that it has to be seen or heard, it has to be lived through. In it the climax of love and passion are reached; the senses become faint with the overmastering surge of sound. Heart and brain and nerves lie quivering in the agony of the complete surrender and the complete victory borne out before them. The duet is the incarnation of passionate love, and there are no words to convey it to those who have not undergone it.

The house was in total darkness; the light on the stage so faint as hardly to show the two dim figures on the mossy bank. Isolde's golden hair and Tristan's regal cloak were felt rather than seen. Their voices rose and fell, till their passion and wild pathos came to breaking point.

Jean Douglas sat forward, her right arm on the ledge of the box supporting her face; Lady Latimere leant back in her chair, whiter than usual. Even in the deep shadow John Douglas could see the pale outline of her face. Her opera glasses lay in her lap. She moved slightly and they fell between her and

him. He bent down, and picking them up, held them in his left hand. Mechanically she held out her hand, whether to take them or not John never knew, but his right hand closed over hers and held it close. As if he had touched an electric battery, the current swept over him, clutching him from head to foot. His throat pulsed, his heart contracted, the waves of sound coming from that wonderful outpouring on the stage were nothing compared to this wild sea of feeling into which he suddenly found himself hurled.

Was he mad or dreaming? was this really her hand resting in his, unresisting, passive, no, acquiescent? Once he felt a gentle answering pressure, and then it lay still, as if it had found a resting place. He thanked God Jean was there, for in that sheltering darkness he knew not to what other madness he might not have been tempted, she was so very near, a faint breath of something sweet like irises reached him, and the desire to take her in his arms was almost insane. He turned and looked at her; it might be the only moment in his life in which she would belong to him, he would drink it to the full. She was sitting straight upright now, looking before her; his eyes and all his will were on her, slowly she turned her head towards him. Between the brows a single line made a deep furrow, she was white as marble, and there was the Lorelei look of horror stamped on the beautiful mouth and in the wide luminous eyes. For a moment these two looked into each other, and for the space of a heart beat the world and time stood still for John Douglas. Then her face changed, a little smile touched the lips, something welled up in

the eyes like the day by the cherry tree; the man knew his boat was in the whirlpool.

He was not quite sure what happened after the lights went up that time. He glanced at Lady Latimere and saw she was still very white. He pushed his chair right back into the shadow, and listened to the two making a few desultory remarks, but even Jean was rather silent.

He said he'd go and see if the motor was there as it was then past 10.30.

He took his sister down, put her into it and went and gulped down some strong black coffee. There was only five minutes before the last act after his return.

"I didn't know it could be like that," Lady Latimere spoke low and very softly. There was a look of unshed tears in her eyes.

"I don't think anyone can know what it's like till they experience it. That's why I wanted so to bring you," John's voice was low and a little husky. He sat in Jean's chair; he didn't dare to be so near her now they were alone.

The shepherds' pipe helped to brace him for the last act.

But long before Isolde reached Tristan's deathbed and the *Liebestod* he had drawn his chair nearer. The house was not so dark this time, he could see the shimmer of her dress, the rise and fall of the long pearl chain to her breathing, the gleam of the diamond garland in her hair, the white jewelled throat.

He stretched out his hand and took hers between both his own. He had tasted of the tree of know-

ledge; let those who have, and then resisted it, alone be his judges.

Even in this moment he was not blinded. He knew she was under the music's spell, that he owed such mastery over her to Wagner, not to himself, but if the victory was short-lived, it was none the less sweet. It might last a few hours, "a day and a night and a morrow," and she would be as elusive as before.

God forbid he should press his claim for the advantage gained in such an hour. If she chose to forget, he would not remind her, it was the least he could do, however hard. He had not fallen so low —yet—he still had hold of the helm, even in the whirlpool.

He saw her close her eyes from time to time, and over them both swept the wild surging *Liebestod*. Never again could he come to Tristan with anyone else, and to the end of life its music wherever heard would hold an unforgettable remembrance.

He wondered in a dazed way what she felt, if she was conscious of the mad turmoil beside her. Surely it was not possible to draw the physical currents to such tumultuous floods without their finding some counterpart in her.

Just before the end he pushed his chair back and stood near the door of the box. He saw her draw into the shadow of the short side curtain; neither could stand the blare of applause and lights that would follow. While it lasted they neither moved nor spoke; gently he put the transparent cloak round her shoulders.

"Let's wait till they are all out of the entrance place," she whispered. "I can't bear them now."

She looked grave and sad, like a tired child.

"I'll take you out the other way. Come!" he held the door for her to pass.

In another few minutes they were in the motor.

"I wish I hadn't promised Letty Portsdown to go to-night. I want to be in the dark and remember it all." John wondered if her "it" was the same as his, but he knew it wasn't. She went on:

"Oh! those two, and poor dear Mark, I could weep for him as well; he is such a gentleman, and he did love her too," there was a tremor in her voice.

"I think to-night I am only sorry for Tristan because he had to die and leave Isolde," John said slowly.

He hardly knew which was most dangerous—speech or silence, and he didn't care much.

"Yes, but she followed him, only perhaps it isn't the same on the other side," a pause. "Let's go for a drive for half an hour;" her voice had the suddenness of a child's making a hare-brained plan. "I can't face that jigging crowd yet."

John looked at his watch by the light of the next lamp post.

"It's nearly 12, I must be there soon to take Mrs. Errington to supper." This conversation was steadying him. "Supposing you drop me at the club, let the motor take you to Grosvenor Street as you said you wanted to go there on your way to the ball, keep it, and come back in it for me, that will still bring me up to time and give you more breathing space."

"What a plan mind you've got," for a moment a mischievous twinkle showed.

"I want to go to the ball," this almost in a whisper. "You've promised that after one I am to have the best waltzes, and that you will stay late."

"I don't know now."

"But I do," his voice was very quiet, but it meant business.

The motor drew up a few steps from Brooks' and John jumped out. He stood bareheaded as it drove away.

In twenty minutes he was waiting in the street, black knee-breeches, silk stockings and all. It was too hot for an overcoat.

The motor drew up and he got in. Lady Latimere was sitting far back in one corner.

"Are you readier now?"

"No, not a bit but I suppose I must."

They hardly spoke, they had both been in the land of dreams, and the return to earth is always a shock.

In a few minutes they reached the awning and drove under the great portico.

The house, one of the most magnificent in London, was ablaze with light and flowers, full of bejewelled women, and beribboned bestarred men.

"There'll be no real dancing till two, I'm sure," whispered John, as he met her at the foot of the stairs. "You won't fail me—to-night," his eyes and voice pleaded.

She looked up and smiled as she passed on to greet her host and hostess who still stood receiving their guests at the head of the great marble staircase.

There was rather a crush at the first entrance to the long ball-room, a dance was just over, and John found himself close beside her, though he had waited for three other people to go upstairs in front of him.

"Who is that small woman John is talking to in the doorway?" Mary Errington and Jean Douglas were standing at the opposite side of the room as she asked the question.

John caught sight of them and made a sign.

"That's Lady Latimere, attractive-looking, isn't she, and seems nice. She's asked John and me down to Hardene on Monday for two days. I want to hear her sing, too."

Lady Latimere was standing slightly in front of John, and her head was turned back upwards towards him, being so much taller he was bending forward to speak to her. Something in his attitude or his look made Mary Errington start. In a flash of intuition she knew what had caused the change in him; her heart smote her, with pity and remorse. If she was right and she knew she was, this would bode no good to John, leastways it could neither mean happiness nor marriage.

John threaded his way across. His slight tall figure looked very distinguished and his leg was made for a stocking. So thought the two who watched him come, and the one who watched him go.

"Thank you for waiting," he smiled at Mrs. Errington. "Let's go now, as it's far too crowded to dance. I've just seen the Royal party go to their's, and the big room downstairs is open for lesser fry. What about you, Jean?"

"I'm all right, and I'm engaged for the next five or six."

At that moment a tall dark man with a foreign decoration came up, and made her a click-heeled bow.

Mrs. Errington took John's arm. Passing out, they came face to face with Lady Latimere in the midst of an altercation between two men, who each insisted on taking her to supper. She caught John's eye and smiled.

"That's your Nauheim friend, isn't it?"

"Yes, do you know her?"

"No, but Jean pointed her out when you came in. If she is as charming as she looks, no wonder you and Marny fell victims."

He looked sharply at her, knowing how quick and true her instincts about people were, and how her perceptions almost amounted to second sight.

"Yes, she's very attractive," he answered casually, "and her singing quite beyond the average." He was on his guard, but he felt the beautiful eyes search him.

A sudden resenting anger swept him. If this woman instead of the other had ever sat hand in hand with him through the love scene of Tristan how different life would have been. It was her fault that his boat was whirling in the rapids. Had she loved him he would never have looked or thought of any other. No Lorelei of past or present could have arrested his mind or senses for a moment, so he argued in defence of himself. He was tired of suffering, he was in pain now and he sought for some one to bear the blame.

"You look tired; are you well?" Mary Errington's gentle voice broke in on his train of thought, as outwardly he busied himself asking for soup and champagne for both of them.

"The opera was very hot," he said shortly; then his better self came uppermost. After all it was not her fault she could not love him, and it was hardly fair to make her the scapegoat of his wilderness.

His look dwelt on her for a moment. She never looked better than in evening dress, and her jewels enhanced the brilliancy of her eyes. She was all in black and silver; her dark hair and the diamond pointed tiara had a crown-like effect, and the slight flush in her cheeks made her look younger and more animated than John had seen her for several years. Round her neck she wore a famous family heirloom, a magnificent emerald and diamond necklace. He knew it was the first time she had worn it since her husband's death.

"Are you really going home to-morrow, Mary?" Curiously enough he felt more at his ease with her to-night than with Lady Latimere. Between these two the ice had been broken, and he knew the cold plunge below, between him and the other the ice was cracking and bending at every step, but he had not realised the waters underneath.

Now that his resentment against the woman by his side had died down there was something soothing in her presence, something restful in her voice and eyes. "Steadfast of soul" someone had once described her, and he felt the quality keenly now.

"Yes, I must. I promised little Hal not to be

away more than nine days, besides which it's so lovely there just now." She hesitated. "Won't you come for a day or two on your way north?"

"I fear not this time. I must get home, my camp time is nearly due, but in the autumn if you will let me."

A rustle behind her chair cut into her answer. Jean and Lady Latimere were on John's other side, unbeknown to him Mary saw him give a slight start.

"Mary, Lady Latimere wants to be introduced to you. She and I have been supping at the same table," Jean said.

Mrs. Errington got up and held out her hand.

"How kind of you, and I am so glad to meet you," her voice was friendly.

John watched the two, as if he were looking on while Fate wove his garment before his eyes. The one woman whose life had been the main thread of his woof for more than six years now, the other who had darted like a glittering line into the pattern these last few weeks.

He felt curiously detached, but deep within his subconscious self opened its eyes for a moment, and they rested on Mary Errington; when they closed his only conscious sensation was a longing to dance with Laura Latimere. He heard the two saying a few platitudes, and Mrs. Errington turned to him.

"Now I am going home. Will you ask for a taxi for me?" She and Lady Latimere bade each other good-night.

"Our hireling motor is there. I will come and put you into it."

He waited in the big hall while she put on her cloak. The night air blew in fresh and cool. He could hear the lilt of a waltz overhead, and his nerves were all taut and jangled.

"Good-night, John, thank you," then she added, and her wonderful eyes looked like stars. "Take care of yourself, God bless you." Something sad as of a long good-bye was in the words. He bowed over her hand, and felt the best of him drive away with her.

But the *Liebestrank* and the *Liebestod* were in his veins. He dashed up the now empty staircase. Every one was either dancing or suppering. It was long past one. Royalty had gone, and many of the elderly non-dancing element with it.

"Have you seen Lady Latimere?" this of Jean whom he met just inside the ball-room.

"There she is, dancing with that red-haired boy."

"Come on then." He swung his sister out into the maze. The room was still full, but in and out they glided as if it had been empty.

He stopped beside Lady Latimere, in whose eyes he saw a mute appeal for help. He remembered her complaint of the fumble-footed boys, and forgave the red-haired youth.

"The next is ours, I think?" then low so that only she could hear, "and the ones after, too." The music stopped before Jean and he had got half way round again.

"If you are not tired, we'll have our go, say, about 2.30. Got plenty partners?"

She smiled.

"Good movers I hope?"

"Fair to moderate. My foreign attaché was the best but I think he's gone. I'm sitting out the next two with the nice lame Portsdown boy."

John nodded at her and went to seek his partner.

"We'll wait and see what the music is," but he hoped it would be a good waltz. Iffe struck up "Wein Weib und Gesang."

"Nauheim do you remember? Come!"

He had gone a long way since that first dance in the Kursaal.

It seemed hours and days since the opera, and that dark box, but at the first near touch of her, it all rushed back to him. He took advantage of the space, and swept her right round the big room; movement to this glorious music was a relief. It was like letting a racehorse gallop after tying him up in a stall. They had got half way round the room before any one else started, then as couple after couple began, he slowed down. To thread his way between the other dancers he held her closer, and once her hair almost touched his lips.

"The heart is all athirst again,
The drops are all of gold;
The new wine, the new wine,
It tasteth like the old."

The words ran into his mind, beating time to the waltz. He smiled grimly. He had never tasted the old, if he had—but for him there was no comparison.

He felt her lag a little, and he eased slower still. He could not stop quite yet, it meant letting her go. He'd never known before what it was to be a drunkard.

"Don't," he heard her say very low. He realised how close he was holding her. He led her out of the room, down a narrow passage, through a baize door up a small stair, into a charming sitting-room.

"This is Lady Portsdown's own room. Are we allowed in here?" she asked.

"Yes, as friends of the house, not only as ball guests. I asked if it was open and she said it was, as only her friends knew the way to it."

Lady Latimere sank into a big chair. John sat near her on a low stool.

"I didn't know you were a soldier." She pointed to his two miniature South African medals.

"No more I am, only a yeoman, and I was out there for the last eighteen months. I had joined the summer before the war began. It was a bit of good experience and I am always glad I did it."

"Are you still in the Yeomanry?"

"Yes. We go into camp in a fortnight's time."

She looked with her questioning eyes.

"Are you all right, you've looked so white all night, as if you were cold."

"Cold!" he gave a short laugh. "There is such a thing as white heat, you know, I expect it's that."

Was she trying him or what? She could not have forgotten already.

"I'm glad Tristan can't be given again this year," he spoke slowly. "I wouldn't like to think of you there with any one else."

"I couldn't stand it often," her voice was far away, her eyes looked out at the night, they were close to the long French window opening on to a little flat

roof, on which were boxes and tubs filled with growing flowers.

The ice was cracking. He dared not trust it a moment longer. He jumped up.

"Let's go back and dance, or——" he stopped short, his "or" might have led to his dismissal there and then, and he could not risk that. A wild desire to take her in his arms possessed him, to pour his Tristan story out to her, come what might.

"I think we'd better," her voice was grave, and made him think of a spray of cold water.

Three times more they danced, one more lilting and alluring waltz after another. Once when they stopped John Douglas felt giddy, but it was not from dancing. Before the last waltz she had said she must go, but the music struck up, and without even asking he led her out again.

She had brought all this about, she should pay a little of the price, at any rate she should know what price he was paying.

"I can't let you go yet, Lorelei," he whispered passionately in her ear, and the scent of her maddened him. "It's only to-night, just one night of one's life, is it too much to ask of you?"

They glided on, there were not nearly so many dancers now; she said nothing, but the eyes were dark and stormy could he have looked into them.

He knew the music was near an end.

"Good-bye, dear," he whispered, but he doubted if she heard.

It was his motor took her home. Her white face haunted him as she drove away, leaving him to

wonder if there were two boats in the whirlpool, but his heart told him there was only one. He hardly knew if he was glad or sorry.

So ended John Douglas' second dance with Laura Latimere.

It was half-past three when he and Jean reached home. He told her he would probably be out before she was down the following day. He meant to spend it out of London; movement and exercise were necessary. Above all, he must get himself in hand before his visit to Hardene.

There was no sleep for him that remaining night, and once assured Jean was safe in her room, he slipped into an old suit of flannels, rummaged in the basement for a bicycle he knew was kept there, and so out.

The dawn was breaking in long streaks of crimson and gold, the birds in the Park were beginning their first clear notes; sleep was still heavy on London, and nowhere is the hush of dawn more potent than in the crowded haunts of men. Up Park Lane, down Oxford Street as far as Holborn he rode at full speed, back by Regent Street and some of the squares. The action and the fresh morning air soothed and refreshed him. Of course he went up Grosvenor Street; the house looked blank and dull; impassive as Lady Latimere herself could be. He wondered if she was asleep. Could he have looked into a quiet room at the back, and seen her, smiling in her sleep like a child, he would have wondered what were her dreams, but that even she could not have told him, she never remembered such things. His thoughts

passed on to Mrs. Errington. Her good-bye made him uncomfortable; that she had guessed or seen something he was convinced. He was jealous of his secret. It was his affair; he hated that any one should even guess at its existence, most of all the woman he wished to marry.

There was no contradiction to his mind in this. A Lorelei was not for marriage, at least not for those who recognised one as such, even were it possible, which in this case it was not. You could be in love with one, be drowned by one, but marry one? as soon marry a mermaiden. He smiled at his own conceits, but he was under no self-deception as to the rioting fire within his veins.

By five he was in again, and fell into a restless sleep for a few hours. By the time Jean was having a late breakfast her brother was on his way to the upper reaches of the river, where he knew solitude coupled with exercise and leisure were to be found.

* * * * * *

The shadows were dark and long aslant the great lawn of Hardene the following Sunday evening. Across it strolled Lady Latimere and her husband. His arm was in hers, as he told her his various fishing exploits in Norway. He looked bronzed after his month's yachting cruise, his eyes had the freshness of the sea in their clear blue. Of medium height and slim in figure, lithe and active, Lord Latimere was an unmistakeable sailor.

"Jolly being home again with you, Laura." He had arrived that morning and had met her as she

came out of the little church in the park. "Don't know that I think you look extra well after your cure though."

"I had such a night out on Friday, the opera and then that ball," she spoke absently.

"Who do you say is coming to-morrow?"

"Sir John Douglas and his sister Miss Douglas. I told you about him and his old aunt at Nauheim, and how kind they were to me. He and the girl are in London this week. George and he were at school together. Agnes Merton's coming, too, that's all."

"Glad they're not all here to-day, and that I've got you to myself for one evening," he pressed her arm. She turned and looked at him.

"You old silly, one would think you'd been away six months."

"I can't help missing you however short a time I'm away, dear, and the sea doesn't make up for it," he smiled but there was a touch of sadness in his face. "I don't think you ever miss any one, do you?"

She laughed. "I might miss you if you didn't miss me, but one missing is enough. Come along, it's time to dress."

Had John Douglas heard he would have understood that she escaped up her solitary rock from others besides him. Happily her husband knew nothing about the Lorelei, or her rock, or whirlpool, and so was safe. He only knew his wife was a very attractive woman, and he a very lucky fellow; that he did not always understand her only increased his admiration, and he supposed no man ever did always understand a woman.

The Douglases arrived the next afternoon, and found their host and hostess and Miss Merton round the tea-table under a large old oak tree.

"It only needs Miss MacLeod to complete the party," said Lady Latimere behind the tea kettle. "I do wish she was here. Teddy, Miss MacLeod is exactly like a younger Granny, and makes even me want to be good."

Her husband gave a little whistle.

"What a pity she isn't here," he said drily.

"I'll tell her that, she'll be so pleased," smiled Jean. John Douglas and Miss Merton were talking Nauheim.

"What about a game of tennis before dinner. Do either of you feel like it?"

Lord Latimere looked at the brother and sister. "I hope Laura told you to bring tennis things."

"Yes, do let's play," said Jean. "English lawns are always such a treat after our mossy Scotch ones, but I'm afraid I'm very out of practice."

"Oh! that doesn't matter, we all are. I've been rolling about at sea for a month. Come on then, you and I will play her and your brother. I know I need not suggest anything else for you but a comfortable chair near the tennis court," he added kindly to Miss Merton. His manners were always those of the courtly, genial son of the sea.

Very soon they were hard at it. John and his partner won the first set easily. He was surprised how well she played, somehow he had not connected her with games. They changed over; the next set was five all, and won by the other two.

"We must have the conqueror. Play up, Teddy," called Lady Latimere. "Make him run about more, Miss Douglas, he hasn't found his land legs again." Once more John and she won, then they all threw themselves hot and breathless into the chairs by Miss Merton.

The tennis ground was below the long terrace, and from there was a good view of the house. It looked stately in the evening light, the fine Georgian lines silhouetted against the sky. In the centre of the long facade, pillars separated the drawing-room windows, and above was a handsome parapet forming a stone balcony round the flat roof. A great avenue of oaks led away down a green glade straight opposite the terrace; at each end of the latter were formal flower beds ablaze with colour.

It was all beautiful and dignified and stately, but somehow as Douglas looked at the slight figure and peculiar personality of its mistress he felt that this was not her setting. It might all belong to her, but assuredly she did not belong to it. He scarcely knew to what surroundings she belonged, but something wilder than this stately conventional English home would be more in keeping with that untameable element that was so strong in her. There rose in his mind the water beaten rocky heights of the Rhine, then the vision changed to a wild Scottish moor and an old worn tower, strong and inaccessible, where rugged walls frowned down on all intruders; from its deep niched windows he saw her strange eyes look forth.

"Let's go round by the lake, it will be cool out

there," Lady Latimere pointed to a gleam of water in the distance. Jean and Miss Merton got up, too. The two men were smoking and discussing fish and flies.

"I must go and write some letters for this post," said Latimere. "Why not take my rod down, Douglas, and try for a trout?"

"There isn't time to make it worth while to get out the boat, he can fish to-morrow. Come along, Sir John."

He was glad of her command. He certainly did not want to fish.

The other two had strolled on ahead. Lady Latimere took another path, through two deep lines of limes. The air was heavy with the sweet scent, and sound of bees hummed drowsily overhead.

They talked trivially, playing on the surface, like people do the first time they meet after a glimpse at unknown depths.

So they reached the lake. At one end was a lump of rock, rising sheer out of the water to a height of twenty to thirty feet. They had sat down on a seat near it, and Miss Merton and Jean joined them.

"The Lorelei rock, Sir John," Miss Merton pointed up to it. "Laura, to-morrow you must climb to the top, let your hair down, sit like the picture, your kimono dressing-gown will do, and we'll photograph you. Miss Douglas and I have both got kodaks."

Lady Latimere turned a smileless face on her friend.

"It's no use unless Sir John is in the boat, and—" she stopped.

"Perhaps it might be arranged," his eyes narrowed as he looked at her. "I'll be fishing, and for the rest we can make believe like the children do."

"You don't want to drown then?"

Miss Merton and Jean had stepped nearer the rock, and the girl had started to climb it.

"Not yet, my lady, besides the Lorelei sang men to their death. I have not heard your voice for nearly a fortnight." His tone was bantering, he was well on his guard.

No power even of hers should make him slip it, here on his first visit to her own house, under her husband's roof; to that he had steeled himself before he came; besides he knew it was all on his side. There was nothing of the wanton siren in her, and should he be tempted to show what lay veiled in his heart, a sharp rebuff and an icy aloofness would probably be his deserts. To accept a silent admiration or more is one thing, to receive a declaration of it is quite another. The one can be conveniently ignored, the other must be honoured or scorned.

There was one thing he understood in her, she was never so friendly as when he was impersonal. Like those to whom physical contact is oppressive or repugnant, mental contact at once sent her flying.

"May we have some music afterwards?" asked Jean of her hostess that night at dinner.

"Certainly, and you shall play to me, and if I've any voice I'll try and sing;" she liked this strong

golden-haired girl, and she showed it in her voice and manner.

They sat at a round table, close to the open window, that also like the drawing-room looked on to the terrace. It was a lovely warm night. The dark panelled walls made a restful background to the lit table with its flowers and glass and silver. Let into the panels the Latimere ancestors looked down on the talking, laughing group.

They all stepped out on to the terrace, where chairs were set round the coffee table.

"Agnes, go and open the piano and play something as a lead off," said Lady Latimere after they had sat there a quarter of an hour.

"No, indeed. I'll open the piano but Miss Douglas opens the ball, come along," she took Jean by the arm. The girl demurred but they disappeared through the French window. There came floating out a Chopin nocturne, followed by a prélude. Lady Latimere looked at John with raised eyebrows.

"That's your sister?"

He nodded.

She settled herself to listen. Lord Latimere puffed contemplatively at his cigar; he, too, was fond music, though he pretended to no knowledge.

The piano stopped.

"Go on," called Lady Latimere, her husband clapped his hands.

"Hush! hush!" she said impatiently, and John saw a quick tap of her foot on the ground.

A lovely minuet of Beethoven's followed, then silence.

"Please won't you come and sing now," Jean's long figure stood in the window.

The other rose without a word.

The room was almost dark except above the piano, where a heavy gold and steel sconce held two lit electric lights.

It was a splendid long room, the walls hung with dark blue damask in loose folds. Four full length Vandykes were the only pictures. Over the great stone mantelpiece was a curiously carved coat of arms. There was something mediæval in the room's atmosphere, and the high-backed gilt chairs and Italian cabinets, added to the effect. The floor was parquet, but not brightly polished, with only a rug here and there; the room being very high the sound reverberated to every note, and was perfect for music. As John looked in, he knew the voice and face would here be framed in a fitting setting and atmosphere.

Jean settled herself in a far corner where she could watch the singer. Miss Merton was at the piano.

Song after song poured out. First French, then Brahms and Schumann; the shadows pulsed with sound.

She was all in white, and the light falling on her accentuated the ghost-like effect in the shadowy room.

Outside Lord Latimere stretched in his chair and got up.

"By Jove! she is singing to-night," he looked genially at his guest. He loved others to hear and admire her voice.

John smiled. He liked this breezy sailor and he

was honestly glad he found him so sympathetic. There are some open simple natures of whom no one could be so mean as to be jealous, they themselves are too unconscious of possession; quickly Douglas had recognised this peculiar quality in his host.

"I think I'll go indoors," he answered back.

He stood in the shadow of the window embrasure, the dark blue curtain almost hiding him.

The accompaniment of "Aime moi" rippled out. John felt the rapids foamy round his small bark. At the end the singer came across the room, looked at him with unseeing eyes, and stood on the threshold of the window, close to where he was. He moved a step forward.

"Are you tired?" he spoke gently. She did not answer. She looked absorbed, and in her eyes that rapt look he had seen once before, the first day she sang to his aunt. She had soared on her own music's wings and left them all behind.

Jean had gone over to Miss Merton.

"How wonderful it is," she whispered. "I didn't like to say anything. It's like breaking a spell. She looks as if she's forgotten all about everything."

Miss Merton smiled. She got up.

"You play something very softly, it will bring her back and she'll probably sing again."

Jean shook her head.

"No, not after that;" she turned over some of the music lying on the piano.

The white figure was still standing by the opening on to the terrace. She suddenly seemed to remember John Douglas's presence.

"No, I am not tired, only we've had enough and it's nearly bedtime."

Lord Latimere stood in the window.

"Ring the bell for the tray, will you?" she said to him; she walked across to the piano.

"Come along upstairs, and to-morrow you must play to me again, and try my own special piano in my sitting-room." She spoke in her usual voice as if she had forgotten all about her own music.

"And you'll sing lots more?" Jean's voice was eager.

"Oh! if you like. You and I and Miss Merton will have a good innings by ourselves."

In another few minutes the three women passed up the big staircase, and the two men went along to Lord Latimere's special sanctum. John Douglas had had no more word of his hostess, and she had merely waved a good-night to him from the door.

He was awake early next morning, woke by the sun streaming into his room, and the shrilly song of the birds. He got up and looked out.

The park with its great trees stretched out in front, fresh in all the gorgeous pride of an English summer morning. A longing for movement and exercise was on him, coupled with the restlessness that the near presence of Lady Latimere always brought. He had noticed it in himself at Nauheim, and it was upon him again. She seemed to have the power of transmitting her own restless activity to those about her; as some people bring calm or idleness into the atmosphere, she injected it with vibrating movement.

It was past five-thirty; he would risk being thought eccentric did he meet servants about. So he threw on a few clothes and once downstairs he soon found a way on to the terrace. He slipped down into the park, and walked by the lake to its far side. By half-past six he turned back towards the house.

As he neared the entrance to the stableyard he saw a horse come out, ridden apparently by a man. It cantered down the park in his direction. As it approached he recognised Lady Latimere.

The sight of her astride jarred on him a little, though her appearance in a long full skirted coat, and a pair of neat brown riding boots left nothing to criticise; on her head a soft felt hat. She reined up as she passed within thirty yards.

"Good gracious, it's you. I thought it was one of the footmen, and wondered if at last we had got an early riser. Where have you been?"

"It was too lovely to stay in. I knew I was in the house of an early bird so if I did meet any servants they would not think I was an escaped lunatic."

He looked at her critically. She was mounted on a small thoroughbred brown hack. She sat well down in her saddle. He had no fault to find except he would have preferred she rode as a woman rather than as a man. She was so feminine, there was something incongruous in her doing anything masculine.

His mind jumped to Mrs. Errington, with whom so much of his riding and hunting in latter years were associated. The vision of her wonderful horsemanship, the straight seat, the quiet hands rose before

him. He knew how he would have hated to see her ride thus.

"Do you always ride like this?"

"Astride, you mean? Yes, hacking and sometimes hunting. You don't like it?"

"Not for you; somehow I don't connect you with anything masculine."

"But I don't look that with this long coat."

"Oh! I don't cavil at your appearance, only as you asked me I don't like the feeling or sense of it. I am very old-fashioned I know;" his hand lay on her horse's neck, and it nosed him for sugar.

"I forget, do you like riding?"

"Yes, I'm very fond of it."

"Come back to the stables then, I'll have Trojan saddled for you. He's my old hunter that I keep up in summer as a spare hack."

John looked down at his flannels.

"Not a very good riding kit."

"You can borrow a pair of leggings from old Thomas, the stud groom. He's got legs like bed posts, they'll easily go over those flannels."

In less than ten minutes John found himself mounted on a good-looking chestnut horse. It was decidedly fresh and went sidling and trying to buck all down the park. This time it was Lady Latimere's eye that was critically upon him. She was impatient of people who did things badly, if they pretended to do them at all. But mentally she passed him; a good seat, light hands and quite at home she thought. John felt the morning brighter even than when he started.

"Do you always ride at this hour?"

"Generally, and to-day I knew I'd have no exercise till evening, if I did not come out early as I'm going to London by the nine train for a few hours."

"To London?" his face looked blank.

"I know your sister won't mind. Miss Merton will look after her. You must fish. I'll be back early in the afternoon. I often run up and down, and I've got several things to do I couldn't get done on Saturday. I only made up my mind when I woke this morning, so you can just explain it to your sister and Agnes, will you?"

Her friendly confidence restored his clouded humour, she had thought he looked put out.

"When will you be back?" his voice was still a little short, but she took no notice.

"About three, and we'll have some tennis anyhow after tea." She put her horse into a canter which barred further conversation. Within half an hour they were back at the stables.

"I'll show you the horses to-morrow morning if you like. I must go and change now. You'd better have some breakfast with me at eight, and you can have a second one with the others about nine. Thomas," she called just as they were leaving the yard. "I want my small motor quarter to nine for the station, no one with it."

"Yes, m'lady."

At eight they met outside on the terrace where a small breakfast table was set. Lady Latimere had made a lightning change; she looked her ultra self again.

"This is the only meal I really like out of doors, no stingies and buzzy-wuzzies; somehow it's natural to eat out of doors in the morning."

"Are you generally solitary in your rides and breakfasts?" asked John.

She nodded between sips of tea.

"When there are people staying here, I do hate the usual breakfast gathering so, and it wastes so much time. Teddy doesn't care much for riding, then he doesn't like breakfast before nine. I suppose sailors make up for never being in bed more than four hours at a time by staying there longer once they leave the Navy," she laughed. She was very forthcoming this morning.

"Do you and he come to Scotland generally?" asked John.

"Yes, but this year we aren't going up till September, he's going to stalk at the Portsdowns and somewhere else, I forget."

"Perhaps you'd both come to Raeford any time that suited you in September, only if I knew a bit beforehand I'd like to have a grouse drive for him, may I suggest it?"

"Oh, do, I know he'd like it, and we've never been to your part of the world." She jumped up. "I must fly, good-bye."

She was through the open window into the dining-room like a flash. John followed but he only heard the thud of a motor engine, and saw it disappear like a small whirlwind down the avenue. The house felt empty as he went up to his room to dress for the day.

The morning hung heavy despite his host's genial

attention, and the sense of freedom to do as you please that both the Latimeres had the gift of imparting to their guests. He tried the lake for an hour after breakfast from a boat, but there was scarcely a ripple and he only caught two trout. Jean and Miss Merton strolled about, and made some music.

There was a vacuum in the air, a waiting stillness, and John Douglas found himself constantly looking at his watch, and hoping his hostess would not miss her train.

After finishing his correspondence Lord Latimere had sought his guest out, and taken him a stroll round the stables and home farm. The two men had a good many interests and pursuits in common; and they compared notes over the difference in English and Scottish estates and their management.

John mooted the visit to Raeford, and after consulting their respective note-books they fixed the date for the last week of September.

They were all sitting on the terrace after lunch when Lady Latimere appeared.

"Look, who I've brought, Teddy;" she held a little boy of six by the hand, "and baby's coming up with nurse in a cab."

She turned to the Douglases. "They're George's children. I found a letter from her which I hadn't time to read till I got into the train, asking if I could take the children till she and George go home, so I dashed there as soon as I could; they've had a house in Eaton Place this summer, and just whipped them off." She laughed her gay infectious laugh.

Freddy had gone over to his uncle. He had blue

eyes like the ones he looked up to, and fair curly hair in clusters.

"Isn't it fun, and we've had no real dinner cos there wasn't time, but Aunt Lorry give'd me milk and biscuits and chocs in the train," he ran back to her and sidled close. She had sat down near Jean and Miss Merton, to whom she was explaining her early flight to London. She put her arm round him.

"Now, darling, come along, and we'll get some dinner for you, or Nanny will be cross," she touched the curls with her lips.

John had never seen her look so gentle. The child gazed at her with adoring eyes.

"I can ride Sally s'afternoon, can't I?" he said in an imploring voice.

"We'll see, come along," they disappeared hand in hand. Lord Latimere followed.

"I must go and write some letters before the post goes," said Jean.

Sir John and Miss Merton sat on.

"Lady Latimere has a perfect passion for children. I only wish they were her's."

Before he could answer their hostess stepped out with a child of two in her arms.

"Agnes, you must look at Nancy, isn't she sweet, and hasn't she grown?"

Nancy's head was all curls, too, but instead of blue eyes like her brother's, they were great brown ones that looked solemnly at Miss Merton, then at John Douglas. At the sight of the two strangers the little head nestled into Lady Latimere's neck.

"She's tired, poor little darling, I only brought

her out for a moment, just to show you my treasure troves. I am glad I went up and rescued them from that stifling place."

A stout white figure stood behind her.

"All right, Nanny, here we are, but I had to show Nancy to Miss Merton. Now we'll go upstairs and if your rooms aren't ready yet, you can put her to bed in my room for a good sleep. No, let me carry her."

Miss Merton looked at John and sighed smiling.

"Yes, I see," he said simply.

"She adores those children and they her. I only hope she won't spoil Freddy, but she is quite a good disciplinarian, too, and children always obey her, she has a way with them, as the servants say."

"I haven't seen George Latimere for a year or two, and I hardly know his wife. Jolly little kids they look."

"Yes, if only they were Laura's."

At that moment Lady Latimere's clear voice called "Agnes! Agnes!"

Miss Merton rose quickly and went in. John Douglas remained on the terrace; there was a litter of newspapers on a table near, he took up one after another, and smoked many cigarettes.

An hour passed, no one appeared. He began to feel his time at Hardene rather wasted. At last he got up and walked to the end of the terrace. In the distance he saw a very small pony, a boy on its back, and alongside three women walking. He guessed who they were and started off to meet them.

Lady Latimere led the pony, Miss Merton and Jean walked on the other side. Freddy's face was a glow of pink pleasure.

"I can trot, I can trot," he shrieked as John drew near, "and Aunt Lorry runs lovely."

"Rather hot work for Aunt Lorry," he saw how pale she was, and breathing fast.

"Good exercise," she laughed.

"Suppose you let me take a turn," he said quietly. He stood in front of the pony and laid his hand on the rein. "I can run, too, you try me for a change, Freddy. Your daddy and I used to run races at school and I used to win every time. Poor Aunt Lorry can have a rest and we'll come back to her."

"You won't let him fall off, he has to be steadied now and then;" she was doubtful of giving up her charge.

"Jean, come and run the other side of him then he'll be quite safe, and you sit down under this tree," he added. He was standing close to the small white figure, and something of quiet command was in his eyes and voice.

"Now I've got two grooms I can gallop," Freddy's voice rose to a shriek of delight.

"Don't get excited now or you'll frighten Sally," his aunt called to him. She and Miss Merton sat down in the shade; the former threw her hat on the ground.

"Poof! I am hot—look at those two."

John's long legs were stretching out, his sister ran as easily as he did. The pony was all legs and mane and tail; it was the ride of Freddy's life.

"What a nice couple they are," said Miss Merton; she glanced at her friend.

"Charming, and yet quite different, I like the girl."

"Better than the boy?" queried the other smiling.

"No," slowly, "only she'd never watch anyone like he does; she's much more matter of fact."

"I daresay she would if she cared for them, my dear Laura. Surely you know why he watches you?"

"Now, Agnes, you are as bad as he is with your watchings and imaginings. I do wish people wouldn't, it does bore me so. It's only because he sees some silly likeness in that print, and he wonders if I am like that all through."

"My dear, I don't know or care what he wonders, but the plain truth is the poor man is under your spell, and the less you mean him to be, the worse it is. Do you remember, once at Nauheim I told you other people mightn't have marble egos to fall back on?"

For a moment the night at Tristan flashed back to Lady Latimere, she felt her hand held in two strong ones and through them some premonition of what was happening at her side; she coloured slightly at the remembrance. It had been so unwittingly done. Deep within her she had the consciousness of not having played fair; it was only the surging music that had compelled her to share it with the one at her side, the music, not the man. She would like to have the courage to tell him so, for fear—for fear, yet how could she, the only way was to ignore what

had passed, but it made her feel uncomfortable and untrue to herself and him.

She looked at her companion gravely.

"Don't you pretend I am a Lorelei, too, please, if I were I'd make people care, and play the mischief too," her eyes gleamed, "as it is I do really try and prevent them. I'm sure if you'd ask Sir John, he'd acquit me," but she was thankful Miss Merton knew nothing of the opera, and she wished she could wipe it off the slate, not for her own sake, but for his possible readings of her actions.

The return of the pony party cut short Miss Merton's reply, but she gave Lady Latimere's hand a playful little squeeze.

"Oh! they *can* gallop," panted Freddy, "did you see?"

Jean had thrown herself full length. John smiled down at a pair of dark eyes.

"Now, darling, say thank you to these very kind people, and then we must go in."

Freddy beamed, first on the tall figure beside him, then down on Jean.

"Thank you aw-felly," he ejaculated, all his curls shook, "and can you run again to-morrow, please, and lots of days after?"

"You'll make them run away, if you are so greedy," his aunt had got up and they were all laughing.

"I'll run again to-morrow," John smiled back, "but after that Jean and I have got to run to Scotland."

"I do hope I'll have daddy long legs like yours

when I'm big," Freddy's eyes were quite round.

Lady Latimere turned to Jean.

"You stay here and recover for a few minutes, and we'll take him to the stables," she moved off beside the pony, "it is kind of you," she smiled up at John. "I do hope Teddy looked after you, and that you haven't been bored."

"He's been awfully kind, lent me his rod, and before lunch took me round the stables and farm. No, of course, I haven't been bored, only a little dull," he looked at her across the pony.

"I'm sorry, what can we do to amuse you?" her tone was slightly scornful.

"I don't need amusing now," he answered pointedly. She looked straight ahead.

"We'll have some tennis after tea to cheer you up."

"You've had a long day, you look very white and tired, my lady, don't you think a quiet single down by the lake in the cool would be better for you, and much nicer for me."

She was not used to having her plans made for her, nor for attention to be drawn as to what effect her rushings to and fro produced on her physically or mentally, those around her were too accustomed to her ways to notice, and if they had, she would have paid no heed. She did not resent it from him, there was a quiet masterfulness about John Douglas that was rather restful to her impetuous wayward spirit.

"As you please, you are like the children and must be humoured sometimes," she replied, but he saw her thoughts were more on Freddy than on him.

An hour later they sat by the lake and watched the long shadows lengthen.

He told her of the proposed date for her and Lord Latimere's visit to Raeford, and talking of that made it easier to keep to ordinary subjects, and restrain from more personal touches. Now and again he looked at the calm white face; he longed to ask if she remembered the night at Tristan, but he held all the leashes in an iron hand. This was neither the time nor the place. Besides he had seen a side of her that day of which hitherto he had not dreamed —her love of children.

Some instinct told him of the deep unplumbed reservoirs of feeling, locked away behind those enigmatic eyes. It explained her to him as nothing else had done; and his hand was steadier on the helm of his boat than it had been since the fateful night of its sudden entrance into the whirlpool.

One thing he had learned; this Lorelei had a heart. He had found the answer to his quest; and knew that as far as he was concerned she stood in no danger; it came as a relief, for himself he had no care what happened.

Some shadow of Agnes Merton's conversation hung over Lady Latimere. For the first time with this man she felt self-conscious, and not quite at her ease. The splintering ice had communicated itself to her when she was alone with him. She had no intention he should break it if she could prevent it; so she kept close to the bank.

She scarcely allowed to herself she liked homage and admiration, she certainly did not wittingly in-

spire them; any avowal of such made her miserably uncomfortable, and irked her with a sense of chains and shackles.

"Has Mrs. Errington gone home?" she asked suddenly.

"She went north on Saturday, I believe," John was playing with a piece of feathery grass.

"I thought her so charming, and her manner so different from lots of those horrid smart women. You and your sister go there a lot, don't you?"

"A good deal, you see her husband was more like our brother," John was determined nothing of the truth should escape, and those questioning eyes were full upon him.

"Were they fond of each other?"

"Devoted, it's only now she is beginning to really live again."

"I wonder if she'll ever marry again," mused Lady Latimere. It was unusual for her to ask questions or surmise much about other people. John wondered if Jean had been talking of Mary Errington.

"I doubt it, she's wrapped up in the boy and the place. Women re-marry much less than men, don't they?" he was trying to delicately change the subject, or lead it into a more general channel.

"Perhaps, I daresay specially when they have been very happy, and have everything they want, and none of the inconveniences of marriage either. How lucky she has the boy. How old is he?"

"Seven, I think, a jolly little chap."

"It will be a great responsibility for her later on." Lady Latimere had not finished yet. John felt

there was some hidden thought behind her remarks.

"She won't funk it," he said quietly, "besides nothing of that sort happens of a heap. I mean it just comes day by day and hour by hour. Marny taught me that from the time I was a kid, and when one thinks a mole hill is going to grow into a mountain in a night it's a wonderfully quieting thought. She's taught it to Mrs. Errington too these last few years."

If Lady Latimere was throwing flies, there was no rise. John's surmise was so far right. Jean had talked of Mary Errington that afternoon when her brother was left on the terrace. Their hostess had fetched his sister from her bedroom to come and take Freddy for a ride. She had found her writing, and on the table stood a photograph of her cousin. Given a lead it was a favourite topic with Jean; and she had hinted that the wish of her life was that her brother should marry Mary. People often made confidences to Laura Latimere after a very short acquaintance, and Jean was no exception to the rule. Brothers did not always share their sisters' wishes, and judging from what she knew of John Douglas, Lady Latimere doubted if he and Jean saw eye to eye over this; unless, the possibility of the truth came to her, perhaps it was Mrs. Errington who did not agree with either of them. In that case it was rather difficult to reconcile this theory with his behaviour towards herself. That John Douglas was neither a flirt nor a butterfly among women she was convinced.

Her natural dislike to analysis whether of her own or other people's feelings came uppermost, and she

had dismissed the subject from her mind. But her thoughts had gone back to the talk with Jean as she asked her questions; nothing in John's voice or manner gave her any clue to the truth, so she concluded it was Jean's wish and no one else's.

He pulled the long feathery grass to pieces, and deliberately changed the subject.

"When you come to Raeford we must go up to the old tower one day; it's about fifteen miles off, away up in the hills. It's the cradle of our branch of the family; I'd like to show it to you. We did it up a few years ago, and sometimes we stay up there and picnic for a few days."

"It will be lovely seeing all that new country. Miss MacLeod will be at Raeford, I hope."

"Oh! yes, and she'll be so pleased you are coming. I am looking forward to hearing you sing in the hall to the organ, Lady Lorelei," for a moment he bent nearer her, and felt his guard relax.

"Good gracious! it's nearly eight, come we must go and dress," she had looked at her watch and jumped up.

Nothing would induce her to sing after dinner. Her long day was sufficient reason for her guests not to press her, but Miss Merton guessed another cause.

The next day a letter in Jean's writing went on its way to Mary Errington. It was written towards evening. Her brother had spent a good part of the day with their hostess, sometimes in company with the others, or alone with her. They had had much music, and whether in Lady Latimere's sitting-room,

or in the big drawing-room, his sister noticed he was always close by.

Jean's communications were always short and to the point.

"Dearest Mary,

"It's very nice here, and one does as one likes. Lady Latimere is quite delightful, and so is he. Her singing is unlike anything I've heard before, and goes right into one. She's got a print of the Lorelei that she got in Germany; she's very like it, exactly the same features, and it makes her voice so interesting. I've never seen John so attracted by anyone before. I hope to goodness he won't fall in love with her. But I'm sure she's all right and plays square. Miss Merton is here too, very nice. We return to London to-morrow, home on Saturday. Mind you and Hal come up there later on.

"Yours ever,
"J. D."

Mary Errington sighed as she read the letter.

"My poor John, is this what I have brought on you, and if it's apparent to that dear blind bat Jean, it must be serious indeed."

The remark about "playing square" comforted her a little. She had been haunted by the remembrance of the ball night in London, it had made her restless and uncomfortable. There was not a touch of jealousy in her whole nature; had John Douglas been attracted by some girl or any woman that he could marry happily, Mary Errington would have honestly rejoiced, but to see him heading for the rocks, and feeling her refusal of him the main cause, was more than her soft heart could bear without a searching qualm.

She made up her mind to go to Raeford for a few days in the late summer, and see for herself how matters stood.

CHAPTER VI

THE WRECK

THE summer passed as quickly as John Douglas could make it by business and sport. He had returned from his yeomanry training the colour of a nut, he had then immersed himself in estate affairs and county work, and in between times shooting. To add to this he constantly rushed into Glasgow or Edinburgh, even occasionally to London. In answer to his aunt's and sister's queries as to all this activity, he told them he was busy arranging a campaign in favour of the new land bill to be launched in the autumn. That there was some hidden cause for all this restlessness and super-activity Miss MacLeod was certain; her loving eyes watched silently for some sign whether her nephew wished to confide in her. He looked much thinner, and sometimes in repose his eyes looked sad and tired. His aunt dated all this since his return to London from abroad. Had he tried to change Mary Errington's decision and again been repulsed? But in that case Miss MacLeod felt he would not have shut her out so completely. Round him was an impenetrable wall of reserve. He was as gentle and attentive to her as ever, more so,

but to all surmises or questions about himself, he was a sealed book.

"Watch and pray," it had been her motto for many years. She would watch for the moment he might want to open his heart and mind to her. She could pray that whatever had clouded his path should not turn to his harm but to his good; that she neither knew nor understood the meaning of the change in him did not touch her bright faith.

Meanwhile John was unaware of any such clear-sightedness near him. He knew work was the best antidote to thought; into all that came to his hand he threw himself with feverish energy. In trying to forget the woman he loved, he had given himself the double task of trying to forget the woman who fascinated him, with the result he forgot neither. Sometimes he laughed at the situation, sometimes he cursed his own weakness. He wondered should Mrs. Errington come to Raeford if he could keep the mask on. He knew in his deepest heart he longed with a passionate ache for the rest of her presence, and yet he dreaded her coming. At other times he almost hated the thought of a white face with strange eyes that came between him and all else.

He had spent a week alone up at the Tower, and had walked after grouse over dogs, till the keeper wondered what ailed his master.

Douglas Tower had been the stronghold of his ancestors in the grim Border days of foray and raid. The square keep had fallen into disuse until he restored it, and made it habitable again. The former banqueting hall was the only public room and there

were four small bedrooms. The wing had been turned into a kitchen and three more bedrooms. It was fifteen miles from Raeford, up a wild moorland road, and they used it as a picnic place from which to shoot the surrounding moors. Everything was in keeping with the age and spirit of the place. The walls of the hall were rough stone, the floor flagged, the tables were trestle boards, and the chairs old Scottish oak. Horn knives and forks, pewter plates and mugs only were allowed. On cold evenings large logs blazed in the original big open fireplace in which was a great iron sway.

A portrait of "dark James Douglas," of 1500, hung over the stone mantel-piece, and though different in colouring it bore a strong resemblance to his descendant. Christina Fraser, John and Jean's old nurse, was the caretaker and cook, and her nephew Donald was the keeper. Kirsty's ways and doings were a perpetual joy to the Douglas family.

"I can tell you what ails the lad," she had answered to Donald's remark, as he threw himself into the armchair by the kitchen fire the night of the fifteenth of August, after a long, hot day on the hill, the third since the twelfth. The hills round Douglas Tower were steep, and in places the heather was old and long as John had pointed out to him in none too gentle a way.

"He's needing a wife and I'm thinking he canna find ane to his likin', for there's nae decent wumman wud say no to our laird. He's no richt somehow," she added, as she stirred the porridge pot, "these two nichts he's said the soup was cold, and it steaming

like an engine, but when a man's camsteery there must aye be something."

"Puir body!" muttered Donald, who had long since given the go-by to all womenkind and had resigned himself to the tender mercies of his aunty Kirsty.

Thus had the faithful retainers gauged all was not well either.

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A long line of blue hills, and the gleam of a river winding through woods of green and gold in the valley below was the view that greeted Lady Latimere as she looked out of her open window at Raeford the last days of September. The Latimeres had arrived in the dark the evening before.

Edward Ferguson and his sister Emily were the only other guests in the house. John Douglas was determined not to have a houseful when the Latimeres came. Three of his neighbours were invited for the grouse drive that was to take place on the Thursday, two days after the new guests' arrival.

When Miss MacLeod and Jean had suggested more visitors, he had firmly vetoed it by saying he knew Lady Latimere would be bored by a lot of people, and as usual he had his way.

The first day was spent at Raeford itself. The weather was glorious, as is often the case in late September in Scotland. The woods were beginning to be touched with the gold and red of autumn's brush; on the hills long splashes of bronze striped the fading purple.

"What a dear old house, no wonder you all love

it." Lady Latimere was standing between the brother and sister as they returned from a walk by the river in the afternoon. They were about a hundred yards from the front door, and she had stopped half way across the big lawn. "It's windows are rather like sad eyes," she went on, "I suppose they've seen lots of queer things all these hundreds of years they've looked out."

Jean laughed. "I never thought of that before. I daresay some of our old forbears' doings would make any eyes sad. I'm afraid the Douglas record is not altogether a white one!"

In the evening light the old grey house looked more smiling than usual. It was a fine pile. At one corner rose a magnificent lantern tower, with a delicate parapet of lace-like stone surrounding the top; on the other side of the main block were pepper-pot turrets. It had that peculiar clustered effect of so many old Scottish houses, one part thrust upon another, and all drawn together by the harling mantle. Coats of arms were flung here and there on the face of the house, and the stone work round the tower and the bases of the turrets was very fine. The oldest part dated from early 1200, the most recent from late 1600, yet it all looked the same age. Inside mediæval picturesqueness was made to join hands with modern comfort. In the present reign much had been done to revive its past splendours.

The old banqueting hall ran the whole depth of the house, and with its vaulted roof, from which hung many of the old Douglas banners, it was a regal room. The walls were wainscotted with dark oak to a height

of ten feet, above, on a stone-coloured rough cast wall, hung old tapestries here and there. In the centre of the great mantelpiece was the special insignia of the Douglas carved in stone, the bleeding heart, surmounted by a royal crown. At one end was the big organ, and at the other a beautiful oriel window from which there was a view of distant hills.

That night after dinner Jean went to the organ and played those of Lady Latimere's songs that were suitable for such an accompaniment.

Miss MacLeod sat in an armchair near the big fireplace and Lord Latimere near her. She looked much stronger for the quiet summer at Raeford; and very charming in her high black evening dress, her silvery hair set off by a bit of old black lace.

"It is the voice of an angel, especially with the organ," she smiled at him. "I can't tell you the difference it made to our time at Nauheim having the pleasure of your wife's acquaintance, and she was so friendly and kind to John and me."

"But it was you who were so kind to her. I didn't at all like her going off there all alone, but she would do it," he shrugged his shoulders in a whimsical way. "It's always such a pleasure to her too, to sing to people who really like it," he added simply.

Miss MacLeod had immediately taken this blue-eyed sailor to her heart, he had of course sat next to her at dinner and she had found him a charming companion.

"To-morrow evening you must sing to the piano," said Jean to her guest, and pointed to a large grand the other side of the room. "Emily shall play for you, she's quite good; she won't be coming with us

to-morrow as she hasn't been well lately, so do give her your music to look at. She's a funny silent creature," this in a lower tone, "but when she gets to the piano she makes it speak, and she's rather a dear."

Miss Ferguson was sitting away by herself, looking at the evening paper, a tall dark women with rather a severe expression. Her brother who had been standing near John came over to the organ. He was tall and dark too, and had piercing black eyes with which he fixed people till they felt Röntgen rays going through them.

"If I send for my phonograph to-morrow will you do it the honour of singing into it, Lady Latimere?" He bent his keen glance on her. "I should like to add your voice to my répertoire if I may."

"It will amuse me very much to hear myself, so do send for it," she looked up at him. "Do you live near here?"

"About ten miles off."

"I may tell you that Edward's répertoire is quite high-class; Melba, Clara Butt, Caruso, Ada Crossley and several others, and he gets them all to do it for love of him on the one condition they are only performed in private and not for money," laughed Jean. "These séances are rather a mystery."

John came across to join the group.

"I am going to sing into Mr. Ferguson's phonograph. I shall be horrified at the sound of my own voice I'm sure, and perhaps shall never sing no more," she put on a mock tragic air.

"Edward ought to be an *impresario*, he is always touting for new prima donnas," John answered, then

he added, "You will come up and join us at the Tower to-morrow, I hope, or would you like to come early? The shooters start at a quarter to nine, and motor up, and if you don't come then Jean will bring you up later in time for luncheon, unless you'll both come with us and spend the day up there." He bent slightly towards her.

Jean and her cousin had turned to the organ and were having a heated discussion over a certain stop.

"Come early and let me drive you up in my two-seater, the others will go in the big car and Ferguson's," his voice was low with the tone of command she had heard before. She nodded assent. After all, why not, to refuse would be putting too much consequence on the invitation.

"I should love the long day out on the moor," her voice was natural as a child's.

Through the green and heathery hills the road to the Tower lay. In the air was a touch of autumn crispness, harbinger of frost, but the sky was a cloudless blue and it promised to be hot. The long view of hills was sharp defined in sapphire outline.

John had taken care to start well ahead of the bigger cars, so that he could drive at his leisure, and be able to do showman along the road. For him it teemed with all the wild romance and poetry of his Border land; here and there an old ruin recalled a family feud, an upright stone marked a great battlefield, a ruckle of stones showed where his forbears had worshipped in the old faith their descendants had since discarded. He found his hearer receptive to the spirit of the countryside as he had felt she would be.

They reached the Tower nearly half an hour ahead of the others.

"Welcome, my lady, to the Douglas den," then as he caught sight of old Christina in her cap and blue morning wrapper, at the heavy studded door, he added, "and this is Kirsty, once nurse to Jean and me, and now custodian of the keep. Kirsty, this is Lady Latimere, and we've all come for the whole day. We'll lunch indoors, and mind you put the drinks in the dungeons to make them cold."

"Yes, Sir John," Kirsty had meanwhile curtsied to the newcomer, with a "pleased to see your ladyship at the Tower."

"And will ye be staying the night, Sir John?" she turned to her master.

"I'm afraid not, we're too large a party, eight of us."

"Ye'll be very hot the day in thae butts, ye'd better take some cabbage leaves to put under yon rideeclus caps," Kirsty usually addressed John and his sister as if they were still in the nursery. "Wull the lady and Miss Jean be going with you?" John nodded, Kirsty looked rather contemptuous and busied herself taking various things out of the motor. She was not very sympathetic to modern ways; to her mind, women's place was at home, with the needle and sorting the house. Jean got many a dissertation on the subject. Suddenly a man's voice was heard calling in the offing.

"There's Donald crying on me; there never was sic a man for roaring all his wants as him," and she disappeared.

Lady Latimere shook with laughter.

"What a delicious old woman, and I love her white hair and long streamers and that deep voice. She looks as if she ought always to have twins in her arms."

"She would amuse you by the hour. When I'm here alone or with Jean we get her in and make her sit with us, and I always wish I had Edward's phonograph at hand to take down all she says. She is a faithful soul, and the real old-fashioned family servant, and no respecter of persons."

By this time they had gone up the winding stone stair, and they stood in the dining-room.

"This goes by the grand name of the banqueting hall, though it can't have held very many banqueters."

For the size of the Tower it was a good-sized room, long and narrow, with an oblong window at one end, and two in the wall facing south.

"They could see their enemies coming from afar anyway."

Lady Latimere went over to the big mantel-piece and looked up at the portrait of "dark James."

"It's like you, only dark, and as if you were in a temper, or going to order someone to be hanged."

John had come behind her; she turned to him.

"Or as I should look if you were unkind to me;" his smile turned to a frown that was a fair reflection of the saturnine face looking down upon them both.

"Don't be silly," she flipped one of her wash-leather gloves in his face, but she smiled as she did so. He caught her upraised wrist.

"Take care, remember you are in the land of lawless ways now.

"'And dar'st thou beard the lion in his den,
The Douglas in his hall?'

you might not get out so easily as Lord Marmion did," he gave a short laugh and let go her hand, but as he stepped back a pace his eyes glinted like the steel of the armour above him.

Here he was master, if he chose to speak she would be forced to listen, whatever the consequences for him might be afterwards. Something of the wild Douglas blood stirred in him, something of the reckless mastery that had so often made the name a byword for lawlessness whether in war or love. But for the moment the restraint of the twentieth century asserted itself, and as at Hardene this was neither the time nor the chance.

"Wait here," his tone was short and sharp, he had heard the other motors. He ran downstairs, they were still some way off.

"Look out of the window, my lady," he called up from the middle of the flagged court. The window framed her head. She had taken off her hat when he left the room to re-arrange her hair; it was the vision of her he had seen that July evening at Hardene; the old rugged wall and deep embrasure encasing the dark head and the white face with the Lorelei eyes.

"Catch!" He threw up a blood-red rose he had picked from the parapet that ran round the court. He was in a wild holiday mood, "without to-morrow, without yesterday," he had cast his barriers to the winds for these few days. What matter the reckoning after, he only would have to pay.

Before long they were all walking up to the first line of butts. John Douglas walked on ahead with Lord Latimere and Mr. Somerville, the minister, who was as useful in a butt with a gun as he was useless in a pulpit with a sermon, but as he made up in goodness of heart on six days of the week what he lacked in head for an hour on the seventh he was loved by all, high and low, and besides, he had the grace to be aware of his own shortcomings as a preacher. The other two guns were neighbouring lairds, Colonel Richardson, and young Sir David Johnstone, and both particularly good shots.

They had drawn for butts, and Lord Latimere drew number one, which would be the first to reach.

"Will you keep Lady Latimere with you, as that will save her a longer walk, and then if she remains there I will look after her, as you will be number two butt, and I shall be one as I'm six this time, it's a double drive."

John sped up the hill, placing the guns in their respective butts.

"Mayn't I go to the top some time?" asked Lady Latimere when her host returned for the next drive.

"Yes, you will move up with me," he said. He noticed she had pinned the rose in her coat. "The next place the butts number from the top, so we'll be second, and practically on the top of the shoulder, and to-day there ought to be a gorgeous view. Will you mark my card?"

John Douglas was a good shot, and to-day he was on his mettle. They were all shooting with two guns apiece. It had been a very good grouse year, and

he had kept this part of the moor quiet for some weeks in the hopes of giving Lord Latimere a big day. At the end of the drive they picked up ten brace round John's butt. His companion's eyes were dancing.

"What fun it is. I love grouse driving, especially with good shots. It looks so easy and I know it isn't a bit. I'm sure Teddy's enjoying himself. Don't you love it too?"

"Yes, but I like stalking best of all sport really, the old natural instinct of going after one's quarry instead of it's being brought to one. I only wish these hills were still full of deer."

After lunch they motored to the next butts along a very narrow road about two miles further up the glen. John drove very carefully, for here and there the side went sheer down fifty feet into the burn below.

"I don't want to frighten or upset you," for a moment his hand touched hers and the memeory of Tristan leapt in his veins. Before the last drive Lady Latimere said to her host:

"I'm going with Teddy, I think he'd like it, and I've been with you all the others."

John bowed. "Certainly, I want you to go where you like best."

His butt was next, higher up.

"Jean, come with me," and brother and sister went on.

The drive was nearly over. A big covey was skimming past Lord Latimere. John watched him bring down a difficult right and left, a few moments after there came a fearful explosion. A cloud of smoke and earth rose feet into the air. Jean heard

her brother mutter "Good God!" as he dashed out of his butt and tore down the hill. The relief of being greeted by both Latimeres standing upright and smiling was quite past words.

"We're all right. My second gun loosed both barrels by mistake, but luckily it's only blown the butt to bits and no one in it."

It was a kind way of letting down the wretched loader who had collapsed on to the heather seat, shaking like an aspen, and white as a sheet

Lady Latimere touched the man's shoulder.

"It's all right, Thomas, there's no harm done, but what happened?"

Thomas was Lord Latimere's valet, and usually a safe and accomplished loader.

"Oh! m'lady, I don't know 'ow it was except I've got such a headache, and didn't see what I was doing. Please, m'lord," he staggered to his feet, "to take my notice, as I never could ask you to keep me now."

"Don't be an ass, my good man, and pull yourself together. Next time you have a bad head say so, that's all. There, sit down again for a bit," he turned to his host. "I'm awfully sorry, Douglas, to have been the cause of such a fuss, my only comfort is, it's at the end of a delightful day and has not interfered with all our fun." He looked to see both guns were unloaded, then he linked his arm in his wife's.

"Sure you feel all right, dear?" his tone was very tender, and showed his unspoken thought.

"Yes, quite," and she gave his arm a squeeze.

John felt his face was still the same shade as Thomas'.

"Well, thank God you are both untouched; it makes one sick to think about," John looked from one to the other. Lady Latimere was as cool and unconcerned as her husband. Jean had joined them directly after her brother, and stood quite speechless. The other guns had all come running down.

"By Jove!" young Sir David stood open-mouthed, and stared first at one Latimere and then at the other. "By Jove!" he repeated.

"That's the second squeak of a bad business I've seen with a woman in a butt," muttered Colonel Richardson, who showed his emotion by violently blowing his nose. "I'll bet she got in the loader's way," this all in an angry undertone to Edward Ferguson, who told him to shut up. The Colonel was a reputed woman hater.

"Now please don't make heroes of us. It wasn't our doing either that it happened, or that nothing happened."

"It was by God's grace that nothing happened, madam," said Mr. Somerville in his quiet sonorous voice, and for a moment he lifted his cap.

Rather a subdued party gathered round the tea table in the old keep. Of course the conversation ran entirely on shooting accidents, and everyone told the most disastrous they remembered. At last Lady Latimere exclaimed:

"If you all go on like this I shall feel Latimere and I have disgraced ourselves and disappointed all of you by not having our arms, legs and heads blown in every direction." There was a general laugh and they allowed themselves to talk of other things.

Kirsty's face was grimly set as she bustled in and out of the room in answer to appeals for more hot water, milk, cream and such like. One of the other loaders had already recounted in the back premises the fright they had all got and the state of the blown-up butt; the tale lost nothing by the telling.

"Yon Englishman looks a feckless body," she jerked her head towards the ashen Thomas, who sat drinking his tea with shaking hands.

Just before the party started home Jean met Kirsty alone in the passage.

"And a pretty kind o' a mess there near was to-day I'm hearing."

"Yes, wasn't it dreadful, Kirsty?"

"H'm! You ladies should just bide at home and no go ranting round with guns and bullets."

"But it wasn't Lady Latimere's fault, it was the wretched loader."

"An ower fu' house is ill to do with, my mother used to say, and I'm thinking one of thae butts is the same," with this cryptic remark Kirsty swept past her young mistress to help to pack the motors.

On the way home John Douglas was very silent. He had not got over the shock of that awful moment and his fear of what he should find at their butt. His thoughts were difficult to analyse, but in the mist of his mind two things were clear. Firstly, he was as honestly thankful to see Lord Latimere alive and safe as his wife, secondly, had she been killed she would have gone with no knowledge of his—John's —feelings towards her.

"Will you do something to please me?" he suddenly asked. "Latimere tells me you are not going on with him to his next visit, and that he must go on Saturday. We all, Marny and Jean and I want you so to stay over Sunday or as much longer as you will, but specially to be here on Sunday. I want you to hear Marny speak, and for the first time since spring she's going to that afternoon, and if you'd stay perhaps you'd sing one or two sacred songs, the people would like it so. If you will, the service shall be in the hall, so that we can have the organ."

"It is so nice of you. Yes, I think I must, and I'm only going down to my father's till Teddy returns. I would so like to hear Miss MacLeod."

"Thank you, it will make up a little for the agony I went through this afternoon."

Miss MacLeod had, of course, to be given chapter and verse of all that happened.

"My dear child," she put her arm on her young guest's shoulder, "I do hope your husband won't ever let that man load for him again."

"But poor Thomas will be safer than any one else now, he's had such a fright. I'm far more sorry for him than for us."

"Well, he won't have the chance here, anyway," broke in John grimly, "to-morrow is a rough day's shooting, and only one gun apiece. Marny, Lady Latimere will stay over Sunday, and we'll have the gathering in the hall, and she is good enough to sing one or two solos, so you and she can arrange it all."

"Oh! that will be delightful. You must sing one anyhow before I speak and that will help me, as I'm

rather nervous after so long a silence." A faint flush rose in the soft cheeks.

There was no music that night after dinner. It had been a long day and they were all quite ready to sit in easy chairs. A quiet game of bridge went on in one corner between four of the men, Colonel Richardson and young Johnstone having remained for the night, in order to be on the spot for the next day's shoot.

Lady Latimere sat near Miss MacLeod and held wool for her to wind. There was a genuine affection between the two, though little did his aunt think that here was one of the chief causes of her John's change.

There was no suggestion that the ladies should go with the shooters next day, instead Jean took Lady Latimere and Emily Ferguson a drive in the motor, to show the former more of the country.

That afternoon while they were all out, and Miss MacLeod was sitting under the big lime tree near the house, a telegram was brought to her. It was from Mary Errington, asking if she might come with her boy the end of the following week for a few days on her way south. Miss MacLeod had been hoping for this all summer. Without a moment's hesitation she wrote on the reply form: "Of course, delighted, Marny."

She put Mary's telegram in her pocket, deciding to say nothing to John till within a day or two of Mrs. Errington's arrival. If he had long notice he might go away, yet Miss MacLeod felt sure from all she knew of Mary that had there been further passages

between them she would not have suggested coming to Raeford at a moment when he was sure to be at home. The only other possibility that came to her mind was, had Mary given a specified time to reconsider her decision, and was this the cause of his unusual restless activity? But somehow his aunt did not feel she had struck the truth. She would say nothing for a few days and trust to chance that Mary did not write to Jean.

That evening song after song poured through the vaulted hall; this time to the piano and Emily Ferguson's accompaniment. Her dark melancholy face grew bright and animated as she played, and felt the surge of sound sweep through the room.

Before dinner the phonograph séance had taken place, and afterwards the audience listened to the result, and pronounced it quite good. Lady Latimere herself had gone into fits of laughter at her own voice.

"Is it really like? because if so, I can't think why anyone ever asks me to sing. I don't like it, do you, Teddy?"

"Yes, but I like it better out of the phonograph."

"So we all do," smiled Miss MacLeod, "but when one can't have coffee we drink chicory, it's like that, and as we can have coffee to-night, don't let's have any more chicory."

John looked at the singer without speaking. Her black velvet dress set off her whiteness, in her hair gleamed the garland of diamond leaves she had worn the night of Tristan. He stepped close to her.

"Sing 'Aime moi' now," he said almost in her

ear, the others were all clustered round the phonograph and gramophone.

"Why?" It sounded like a challenge.

"Because I ask you to, and you are in the mood, look!" He pointed to an old mirror that hung close by. "Though it's not necessary for you to sing such words."

She saw her own reflection. She could not help smiling at the delicate compliment, and she sang the song.

When good-nights were said John held her hand without a word, but he let his eyes unguard, and her own fell before what she saw.

Lord Latimere left early the next morning to reach his destination in the Highlands so as to be on the ground for stalking on Monday morning.

He had thoroughly enjoyed his days at Raeford, and he and the Douglases parted with many assurances of further meetings.

"How nice to be our first trio with Jean to make it a quartette," said Lady Latimere when she realised she was the only visitor left.

She and Miss MacLeod were sitting out under the latter's favourite tree, a great shady lime. It was extraordinarily warm for the time of year, and they had had an early tea outside.

The Fergusons had gone away directly after lunch. John had taken his guest for a motor drive, and they had come home for tea. She had thought him in excellent spirits, indeed more vivacious and elated than she had ever seen him. Not once had she felt

the sense of *gêne* and self-consciousness that lately had crept over her when alone with him.

"Is there anything particular you want me to sing to-morrow? Jean has gone in to practice and I've promised to go in in half an hour and go over one or two things with her. Perhaps you'd tell me what you're going to speak on, and then we'd try and fit in my singing to it."

Miss MacLeod smiled at her.

"It's so dear of you to sing at our gathering. I am going to speak on the love of Christ and the service of Christ. Love and service are the two real things, aren't they? and if one loves enough, and in the right way, one wants to serve." The delicate colour rose a little in the sweet old face, she never obtruded her opinions, yet she carried her flag unfurled always, and where she could do so unostentatiously, and where she felt it would be understood, she waved it.

"Couldn't we have for one of the hymns that beautiful one in your Scotch book, Jean showed me this morning, 'O Love that wilt not let me go,' and then perhaps I might sing 'The King of Love my Shepherd is;' I've got it here with me."

"Yes, that would be perfect, and to end let us have 'Glory to Thee, my God, this night.' I have never forgotten your singing it."

"Of course, then I'll do those two as solos, and I'll go through them with Jean on the organ now."

Miss MacLeod took up her knitting.

"It's so silly of me, but I feel so nervous about to-morrow; that comes of rust and idleness."

"And illness," rejoined her companion. "You will be all right when you begin. I'm like that sometimes and nearly die before I sing, but once one is off, one forgets everything but the music and letting oneself go."

"I will remember that to-morrow when my old heart starts bumping."

Lady Latimere leant back in her chair and was silent. She turned her eyes towards the house. Sounds of the deep boom of the organ came towards them. Her mind flitted to what Jean had said at Hardene about Mrs. Errington.

"Now I see this place and your lives here I understand better what you once said at Nauheim about Sir John marrying, he really ought to before long; I mean for the place's sake and the family and all that, but it would be horrid here without you and his sister."

"Not if some really nice woman was here," her hostess laid down her work and sighed, "and think what a difference for him. I haven't been very happy about John this summer; he is unnaturally energetic, it amounts to restlessness, and I can't account for it. To me he looks thinner too, and sometimes so tired and sort of dragged looking. Do you notice any difference in him?"

Lady Latimere pulled her hat a little over her face. This talk made her slightly uncomfortable, though at any rate it showed that Miss MacLeod had noticed nothing in her nephew's attitude towards herself.

"No, I don't think so, he looks thin and hard, but I often think active men do in the summer; and he

seems in very good spirits, in fact more so than when he was at Hardene." She paused. "Do tell me, isn't there any one he wants to marry,—or who wants to marry him?" she added with a little laugh.

"I don't know if I ought to tell you, but I know I can trust you, and you seem so quickly to have become a friend to us all. Yes, there is, and I know you have met her—Jean told me. It's Mrs. Errington, the one woman in the world for him, and everybody sees it and wants it but Mary Errington herself, which meanwhile makes it rather impossible." Miss MacLeod took up her knitting again.

"She does not want it and refuses him?"

Lady Latimere sat upright with a sort of spring; she had spoken very slowly but her eyes flashed, and had Miss MacLeod been looking she would have seen a gleam of anger pass over the white face.

"He's asked her to marry him for the last year, but she won't hear of it. I think the idea of remarriage is distasteful to her, though she is very fond of John, and except that night at the Portsdown ball he has not seen her for nearly six months. I am sure he is trying to forget, hence all his feverish activity. It really is a trial, and yet I don't despair if only he will have patience."

So he was trying to forget another woman by making a catspaw of her, Laura Latimere. She felt hot all over, and there and then she made up her mind to punish him for his daring presumption. He had called her a Lorelei; she would play the part in order he might run his boat on the rocks, perhaps a plunge in icy waters might restore his senses. Luckily it

was nothing to her, she liked him as a friend and play-fellow but no more, yet how did he know that? For all he knew, by the way he had behaved she might have been growing fond of him herself. She tapped the ground with her foot, but her voice was calm and cool as usual as she replied:

"Oh dear! what a pity. I thought Mrs. Errington looked so charming. Thank you for telling me;" mentally she regretted Miss MacLeod had not done so long ago at Nauheim. "Of course I'll never let him guess I know anything from you."

Little did his aunt think what a rod she had put in pickle for her darling boy; but though for the moment it was in a pair of small angry hands, they meant to use it for his ultimate good.

If there was nothing of the dog in the manger in Mary Errington, neither was there a vestige of cat in Laura Latimere. She had no intention though to be taken as a dose of the waters of Lethe. The remembrance of the night at the opera and the ball came vividly back. She clenched her hand and resolved to take full toll. If John Douglas was trying to forget one woman, there should be a scene with another he would not forget. Her sense of humour bubbled up. There was something really ludicrous that here had she been for three months warding off a love avowal from this man, only to discover that he looked on her as an anodyne to his hurt at the hands of another woman. She smiled inwardly, for beneath her anger was the sense that in all honesty and quite unconscious of all these new-found facts the remedy for forgetfulness was evidently beginning to tell.

Mercifully for all their sakes Lady Latimere was proving true to Jean's summary, she was "playing square," and her true wish was that John might recover this midsummer madness, and that Mrs. Errington might change her mind.

All the same she was determined to punish him.

"I know I can trust you," had been Miss MacLeod's rejoinder. "There he comes," a tall grey figure came out from the house and crossed the lawn, two spaniels and a collie at his heels.

"You look very comfortable," he smiled down upon them.

"Yes, and I must bestir myself and go and join your sister at the organ to prepare for to-morrow." She turned her eyes full on him, and let them play.

"To-night will you put on a high dress and a skirt that does not trail, I want so much to take you up to the top of the tower and show you a hobby of Jean's and mine. You can see a bit of it from here;" he pointed up.

Above the stone parapet of the great lantern tower there was a glint of glass, like a cupola.

"It's a big star telescope, we spend hours up there on fine nights, or if there is anything specially interesting to watch. It might amuse you to look through it, and to-night promises to be clear."

Circumstances were playing into her hands.

"How delightful. I'll come down dressed for the stars," she got up and looked at Miss MacLeod.

"I'm going in too for a little rest now," the latter replied. John gave his aunt a hand to draw her out of her chair, the three went slowly towards the house.

"Are you coming to the practice?" Lady Latimere turned to him in the front hall. Miss MacLeod had gone on to her own room.

"May I? I didn't dare ask, you are generally so extra unapproachable when you practice."

She laughed and held out her hand.

"Am I so formidable as all that? Come along, and when I begin to really practice you can go."

He took the hand and raised it to his lips. She longed to box his ears but instead she only smiled. They went up to the big hall. Jean was at the organ.

"Do you mind coming to the piano and just letting me clear my voice by a light thing or two?" but it was to clear the way rather than her voice that she proposed this.

She only sang two songs, one French, one English, but they were both passionate love songs, and she let her voice and herself go right into them. As she finished she glanced to where her host sat. His arms were folded, and on his face the set look of dark James Douglas of the Tower; his eyes were on her.

"Now that will do," she said quietly to Jean, "come along to the other things at the organ." She went over to the oriel window where he sat motionless; she had never felt so conscious of her power before. "Now you must go, it was our bargain, and it's practice time." Jean was at the other side of the room, out of earshot.

"Lorelei, do let me stay," his eyes as well as his voice implored.

She shook her head playfully.

"No, not just now. You'll hear them to-morrow."

He got up and shrugged his shoulders.

"Remember the dress for the stars, and till then au revoir."

When Lady Latimere went to her room before dinner, she found a bunch of pure white roses on her dressing table, and on them an envelope addressed to her. She opened it and read the following verses :—

"To whom are you singing, sweet voice,
With your pleading, passionate cry?
My heart stands still to hear,
And I dumbly wonder why.

"What are you seeking, dark eyes?
As you strangely gaze at me
Is it something of me you ask?
How I would that such might be.

"What are you saying, dear lips?
When you smile like flowerets gay
Opening their petals sweet
Till I wonder what you say."

She put her head on one side.

"Verses now, and rather pretty too, he's getting on; well, it's high time all this came to an end, whatever his object is. I am afraid he won't like the answers as much as asking the questions." She smiled satirically to herself.

She put the verses away in a small despatch box before ringing for her maid. Three of the roses were pinned in the front of her dress when she went downstairs.

After dinner John Douglas left the drawing-room when they had had coffee; in a few minutes he returned with a fur coat over his arm; he himself had put on a tweed overcoat. He had announced the

star gazing plan to Jean during dinner. He often took a visitor up to his observatory, so there was nothing peculiar to his aunt or sister.

"You must put this on, for it's cold up there now at nights, shall we go?"

"Aren't you coming too?" Lady Latimere turned to Jean.

"Oh, no! There is only room up there comfortably for two, and I have plenty of it. I'm quite glad to stay by the fire. Besides, I'm going to the organ in a little, I want to run through your things again to be sure of them."

"You can put the coat on in the library."

John held the door open. They passed down a passage to the library, his special sanctum. A beautiful long room with books in natural coloured oak cases on each side. A massive writing table stood between two windows, and on the wall space above hung the framed print of the Lorelei. He pointed to it as they passed.

"I look at you when I write and do my business you see."

"I should hardly have thought it a help to work," she looked up at him.

The pallor of her face was enhanced by the white dress she wore, and the roses but added to the same tones. She reminded him of some delicate water lily, and her eyes had the look of cool green water.

"You got my questions I see," he pointed to the roses, "what about the answers—are there any, or are they not for a fisherman in his boat?"

"I am not sure I can answer them to anyone, I

sing to all sorts of different people, or feelings, some real, some imaginary. What was the next? Oh! yes, eyes, I don't ever mean to ask questions. I s'pose it's how they are put in my face," she laughed a little, "and lips," the faintest colour touched the magnolia cheeks; "why, one can't say what one thinks of when one smiles, as probably it's a different thought every time. There, that's as good answers as I can give to your catechism," her voice was in dulcet tones, she smiled up at him, inwardly hating the part she played.

John's pulses quickened as he looked at her. He knew the place and the hour were at hand.

Ever since the shooting accident he had determined that whatever the consequences she should know how much she ruled his thoughts, and what she had become to him. He could not tell her the whole truth, how because his heart was sore and empty he had sought to fill it with her, but some of it she should know. There was nothing he would ask in return, so surely she would neither resent it nor be angry.

"Thank you for any answers at all. Put this on," his voice was muffled, he held up the fur coat ready for her to slip into. She looked absurdly small in Jean's coat, and her face and head came out of the fur collar like a flower.

He beckoned to her to follow him. The corner where the great lantern tower joined the room formed a round bow, the walls were all lined with dark oak. John touched a panel, and slid back the hidden opening. A spiral stone stair showed in the dim light.

"I'll go first, and if you want to stop please say so."

She came close behind him.

It was a long climb, but he went slowly. At the top was a small door. They entered a circular room about twelve feet across. In one corner was a camp bed; two chairs, a washing-stand and a table were the only other pieces of furniture.

"Whose bedroom is this?"

"Mine or Jean's sometimes when we want to watch and take it in turns, or if we are both up here that chair makes into a shake-down too."

"What mad creatures you are! and what do you watch?"

"'The stars in their courses,' or eclipses and occultations and transits. My grandfather was star mad, so its a hereditary vice. We found his telescope in an attic and we put it up here." He was fitting a key on his watch chain to the door opposite the one by which they had entered. In another moment they stood on the flat leaden roof of the tower, the door shut behind them with a click.

In the centre was the glass cupola of which Lady Latimere had seen the top from the lawn below. In it was a great metal telescope on a pivot. John opened the sashes and the entrance.

The night was brilliant. Myriads of stars shone and twinkled. The Great Bear glittered in the north, one side of the Pole Star, and Cassiopeia on the other. Saturn shone resplendent near Taurus, and Vega shot her blue light near the trail of the Milky Way. All these and many others he pointed out to his companion.

"I am going to show you the ring nebula in Lyra

and the great nebula of Andromeda," but it would have been nearer the mark had he said he was waiting to show her the "bleeding heart" of a Douglas.

"I wish you could see the great nebula in Orion, but he only comes up about 1 a.m. just now. Of course you can see his nebula with a naked eye on a night like this and even Andromeda's, but it's a great sight through the telescope. Worlds in the making, and then we are told it is sacrilegious or atheistic to believe in evolution. Why, it's far more wonderful than any miraculous creation; besides which in either, one always gets back to the bedrock—life—which nothing explains and no human mind can fathom."

He was adjusting the telescope, seated on a small stool in front of it, and he fixed it towards Lyra.

"How wonderful it all is," there was a hush in Lady Latimere's voice. How little anything of human import mattered up here under these mighty worlds.

"Come and look," he stood up.

She turned from the parapet where she was leaning. She sat down on the stool and put her eye to the telescope. It was a little too high for her.

"Can you lower it, or heighten the seat just a shade, I can't reach it," he screwed the stool up a few inches.

"How extraordinary, it's like a glowing ring of fire, with the star in the centre."

"Is it quite clear? I focussed it for myself, but I know you have long eye-sight too."

"It's perfect, I just want to sit and watch it."

For the moment she had forgotten all else, but he hadn't.

He turned over a chart or two lying on a small table beside the telescope.

"Now let me shift it to the star cluster in Hercules. It's a good night for that."

She stepped aside. Something in his attitude reminded her of seeing him at supper with Mrs. Errington, she wondered if she had often been up here; her resolve came back. She returned to the telescope, and looked at Hercules. John then set it to other stars. Saturn's rings drew more exclamations of delight.

"Now for Andromeda. I've kept the best to the last. You need not move."

He stood close behind her and swung the telescope to point at Andromeda. She with her Perseus in close attendance was high in the south-east, with the great square of Pegasus more to the right. John's arms were each side of Lady Latimere's head, stretching beyond it, manipulating the instrument. She raised herself and her hair brushed his throat, she was seated within his outstretched arms. Every sense in him raced, he felt she must hear his heart beat.

She bent forward to the glass and watched Andromeda's mighty nebula seethe and burn. She hardly spoke. Some instinct warned her something else was being forged behind as well as in front of her, and she knew the fires had been blown on by her will these last few hours.

"Now turn and look this way," the voice was

close in her ear, and rang with a tone of command, quiet, insistent.

He had kept his hands on the telescope, and when she turned there was the barrier of an arm on each side of her.

"I want to look at the stars now, it's my turn, but my Gemini are not millions of miles off, thank God."

His hands dropped off the telescope on to her shoulders and held her. Her eyes were stars indeed, wide, lustrous, brilliant. For a moment she felt herself trapped, but she remained motionless, silent, looking straight up into his eyes.

"Lorelei, don't be angry, though I can't help it if you are. Since that terrible moment in that butt I've felt I must speak, though there's nothing to tell you that you don't know." He spoke rapidly, the words pouring out with fierce vibration. She could not have stopped him if she had tried. This was a breaking of the ice with a vengeance, and took her breath away as well as his.

"Ever since that day in the train and all the time at Nauheim you've worked yourself in here," he touched the region of his heart with a clenched hand. "You haven't meant it, I know that, but I just wanted you to know. It isn't your fault if people love you. I thought at first it was only your singing, but God help me, it's you—you!"

His voice ended in a hoarse whisper, his face was as white as the one into which he looked. All the barricades were down, the sluice gates were open, for a moment John Douglas was as unbridled as any of his ruthless ancestors.

Many a time these last few months he had felt as if a fever were in his veins, and now it ran like quicksilver through his whole being.

She had never moved, and her eyes, dark and inscrutable, were fixed like those of a basilisk on him. For once in her life she was a Lorelei in spirit as well as in form, in intent as well as by accident. The man's boat was on the rocks, but he must be completely wrecked to learn his lesson.

Had this happened last night she would have found some means of stopping him, quietly but firmly, begging him to be content with the friendship he had shown her, but Miss MacLeod's confidences had changed all this.

"Laura, darling, do speak to me, you look like you did that night at Tristan," his voice broke. Suddenly he slipped one arm round her and drew her close, with the other hand he held up her face and kissed her long and passionately full on the lips. He felt her stiffen as if resisting, but he only held her more fiercely.

"I don't care how angry you are," he murmured, throwing back his head, "you can't undo that."

But he reckoned without his host. In an instant she sprang away, and faced him with blazing eyes.

"How dare you, how dare you," she stamped her foot, "what have I ever done that you should insult me like this? You bring me up here and then dare to treat me like this. Open that door at once," she knew only his latch key could do so. Her voice and gesture were those of an outraged queen.

For once in his life John Douglas was afraid, not of her, but of himself.

The moment when a man or a woman loses all self control and knows it, is unforgettable; he felt as if he had watched his own body go headlong over a precipice. He swayed slightly as if she had struck him a deadly blow.

He folded his arms and his face was a mixture of pain and pride. There was silence for a full minute as they faced each other, but only one foot had really gone over the edge and he pulled it sharply back.

"I beg your pardon, Lady Latimere, though I have forfeited every right to do so. I don't know what possessed me," he passed his hand across his eyes like one in a dream. The look of suffering in his face pierced through her anger.

"Oh! Why have you gone and spoilt all our nice happy friendship?" She sounded like a child whose pretty toy had been broken by her favourite playfellow.

Womanlike, now the mischief was done she blamed him for doing what she herself had determined he should do, possibly the consciousness that she had cleared the way smote her a little. He was quick to hear another tone in her voice.

"I know nothing is any excuse, not for what I said but for what I did; but just let me say this before you turn me adrift: I never meant to ask anything of you beyond what you have already been kind and gracious enough to give me of your friendship. I know you could never care for me and it was only

because I knew you stood in no danger that it didn't matter how much I cared for you."

"How do you know all this? You seem to think you know a lot about me." Her tone was icy, it cut him far more than all her rage.

"Because I care for you, that's all," his face still looked white, but there was a stern look about the eyes and mouth as if she were the culprit and he the judge. "Even after that night at Tristan, some fools might have traded on that, but I felt it was only the music, and then," he paused and added hurriedly, "Oh! I know I've no right to speak now, but even a criminal may make some defence. When I was at Hardene and saw you with those children I knew your heart was not for the likes of me."

This time it was Lady Latimere's turn to look down, abashed and humbled. Never before had anyone read her so clearly as this man, and despite her indignation she was grateful to him for his strange insight.

"Thank you for that, and though you don't deserve I should ever speak to you again, I have longed to tell you about that night at the opera, as I couldn't bear you should think I meant anything. It was horrible of me and I've been ashamed about it ever since, and I've tried to show you I meant nothing," for a moment she put her hands to her face, she felt it was aflame.

"I never thought you did mean anything," he smiled sadly, "come, I must take you down out of this cold," he opened the door. "Will you wait inside a moment while I shut this up, as you must

let me go first down the stair, and we must put the lights out as we go."

He covered up the telescope and shut all the sashes.

It seemed as if years had gone over him in that last hour, and he felt physically tired and ill.

The violent reaction from the heat of excitement and passion and loss of self control to the chilling consequences had almost unnerved him.

Lady Latimere was sitting on one of the chairs; she too looked white and tired, even her eyes were dull and cold. John held the other door open without a word. She waited on the stair for him to fasten the door and pass before her.

Half way down he stopped.

"You are not getting giddy, I hope. Some people do down so many twists." He saw she had a hand on the wall of the spiral side as well as on the rail.

"No, I am all right and we must be getting near the bottom."

A bright fire was burning in the big fire-place in the library. She walked to it and stood with her hands to the blaze, giving a little shiver. A big clock in the corner struck eleven. It seemed a long time since they had pased through that room.

John Douglas came up to her.

"I know you can't now, but will you try some day to forgive me? I would rather die, or never see you again than think I've insulted you. Nothing you could have said could hurt me so much. I was mad, bad, anything you like, but for that moment I forgot everything, and all that was due to you, everything except your face and eyes under the stars."

He bent his head on the arm that rested on the high mantelpiece.

How easily she would have forgiven him a few hours ago, how she longed to tell him she knew exactly why he had sought her society and more, but her loyalty to Miss MacLeod bound her. His head was still bent, or he would have seen a slight smile touch her lips and eyes, as she would have smiled to herself when Freddy was naughty, but her tone was stiff as she replied:

"I daresay I shall forget it long before you do, which is much more to the point than forgiving," she laid stress on the word forget.

He raised his head and looked at her.

"'To forgive is human, to forget divine,' I envy you that gift, my lady."

His voice was weary, he felt like a beaten dog. The mad exultation that had swept him when he took her in his arms and kissed her had been killed by her anger and then her deadly coldness, leaving him ashamed and numb.

She had reached the drawing-room before he caught her up.

"How cold you both look! John, how could you keep Lady Latimere so long up there?" exclaimed his aunt. "You'll be the death of some of your friends with that star gazing."

"It only turned cold at the end," there was a metallic sound in his voice.

"I'll soon be all right and warm again with you," Lady Latimere sank down on the rug by the fire at Miss MacLeod's feet.

"There's the tray, get her a little hot water and a drop of brandy in it, Jean."

Lady Latimere did indeed look as if she needed warmth. It had taken something out of her to do as she had done, but her conscience was clear this time. She took the glass from Jean and her hand shook.

She still had the fur coat on.

John heard the others talking stars, he felt as if he saw them whirling round him. With his back to the room he mixed himself a strong whiskey and soda, and gulped it down.

Lady Latimere nodded him a curt good-night, not for anything would she have given him a finger tip. He went back to the library, and stood before the Lorelei print.

"It's all my own damned fault and I deserve to be wrecked," he muttered, "I am a confounded fool, not fit for any women to care for."

As he went towards his chair by the fire, his eye fell on a large photo of Mary Errington on a table close by.

He took it up and looked long at it.

"Mary! Mary! My God! I've forfeited the right to even love you now," he sat down and buried his face in his hands.

For the first time for many weeks his subconscious self opened its eyes and smiled.

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Far away by the sea of the western isles Mary Errington dreamt that night that John Douglas was drowning and calling to her for help. His cry rang in her sleep and woke her with a start.

CHAPTER VII

THE BACKWATER

THE big hall was crowded the following afternoon. The furniture had been pushed back along the walls; benches and chairs were placed in rows facing the organ. Slightly in front of it was a small table, behind which sat Miss MacLeod, her nephew somewhat to one side of her, and Lady Latimere to the other. Jean was at the organ.

The day was fine, and the people had come from far away farms and cottages on the estate. It was long since they had had a word from their dear lady. The service was to be quite short in order not to overtax her strength, and John had promised to read the two lessons, to save her as much fatigue as possible.

They began by singing the Old Hundred; a short extempore prayer followed. Lady Latimere thought she had never heard a more beautiful speaking voice than Miss MacLeod's; the words in their perfect simplicity went straight to many hearts, and took them on the wings of her prayer up to the Throne of God.

John Douglas' voice was clear and resonant as he read the ninety-first Psalm. He and his sister had both been taught from childhood to read the Bible

aloud slowly and reverently, and they did so in an easy natural way without shyness or self-consciousness.

"For He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways," something in the voice made Lady Latimere look at him for a moment. He was pale through his tan, and as he said the words, his eyes looked over the audience, out through the windows opposite, and they were sad tired eyes. Had she been too hard on him the night before? There was something pathetic that this man with his charm of manner, his prepossessing appearance, his kindliness and strong personality should seek love and be denied. She felt a flicker of irritation against Mrs. Errington.

Her thoughts were quickly recalled by hearing Miss MacLeod give out the hymn, "O Love that wilt not let me go." Many eyes turned to the small figure standing by the organ who led the singing.

The New Testament lesson was the fourth chapter of St. John's first epistle. Her hearers knew that Miss MacLeod was purposely leading their thoughts to her favourite subject, the love of God manifest through Christ.

There was a slight pause when the reader sat down. Then his aunt got up and said:

"My friends, we have a great treat in store. Lady Latimere has kindly consented to enrich our service to-day by singing one or two sacred songs to us. She is now going to sing 'The King of Love my Shepherd is.'"

Organ and voice rose in a perfect blend of sound,

the instrument a soft velvet background to the lovely voice.

Few of the audience had ever heard the like before, they sat open-mouthed. Lady Latimere stood facing them, and afterwards, several remarked how her face changed as she sang.

John sat shading his eyes with one hand. He was feeling battered and tired, sick of heart, at himself and for himself.

That morning Jean had taken their guest to the parish church. They had all insisted on Miss MacLeod remaining quietly at home; John had made some excuse and had slipped away up the hill behind the house. Nature and solitude were what he needed to brace him for the afternoon service.

The song came to an end, there was a faint rustle through the hall, as happens when people have sat in silent tension and then relax.

Miss MacLeod took her text from II Cor., 5, 14, "For the love of Christ constraineth us."

The colour was rather high in the sensitive face, the mobile mouth quivered a little, but she caught Lady Latimere's eye, and knew there was one person in her audience who understood exactly how she felt, and how her heart was beating. It steadied the fluttering pulses, she drew her tall figure to its full height and there was only a very slight tremor in her voice as she began "Dear friends," and went on in a few words to explain her long silence and the lack of services.

Lady Latimere found herself scanning the faces opposite. There were rugged faced old men with

long upper lips and goaty beards and whiskers; younger ones who looked like keepers and gardeners, others with full beards she felt sure were shepherds. The women ranged from the house servants, immaculate in black dresses and white caps and aprons, to cottagers old and young. The elder ones mostly in black bonnets, tightly tied under red chins, the younger with more modern headgear in which flowers and feathers struggled in gaudy profusion. Children of sorts and sizes with cheeks like polished apples, sat wedged in between their parents. On all the faces was an expression of serious attention, that genius for quiet listening which has so long been ingrained in the Scottish character, nurtured on long sermons and speeches.

But it was no credit to any who listened to-day. The voice had a curious compelling power, the words were simple but measured and flowing, the points were made with a clearness that the youngest could follow and understand.

"The love of Christ;" its power, its constancy, its eternity. These were the principal points, and each was again sub-divided into others. *Its power:* to win, to save, to hold. *Its constancy:* the contrast to human love, with heat and cold, its dependability in all circumstances. *Its eternity:* love not for this life only, but for that beyond, for no true life is possible without love. "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, to-day and for ever."

The speaker had forgotten everything but her subject, the voice rang out in the splendid words, "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life,

nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Then she passed to the second part of the text.

"Constraineth us."

What it constrains us to be? Followers of Christ.

What it constrains us to do? To live and work for Him, and through Him for our fellow creatures. Love for the One begets love for others. "And this commandment have we from Him that he who loveth God love his brother also."

Such was the brief outline of her subject, and through it all glowed her own radiant love and faith, till something of living fire seemed to go out from her to those around, touching them with the divine spark.

Lady Latimere felt her eyes riveted on the speaker's face, many of the words went straight to her heart. Her anger towards the man on the other side of the table melted like snow before the sun, and only a feeling of pity and wish to help rose in her. If she had done him harm, there was still time to try and repair the ill. She took a swift resolve.

Her attention wandered a few moments till she heard Miss MacLeod's closing words. "Dear friends, let us take Christ into our daily life, into all our work and play, into all our pleasures or sorrows, for then and only then shall we know the power, the constancy, the infinity of His love. If we do this we shall be constrained to live for Him,

to work for Him and those whom He loves and we shall have a deep and certain happiness, that no human love however great can ever give us, and a possession for this life and beyond, that nothing can take away. Let us pray."

As they bent forward to kneel down, for the first time that day Lady Latimere's eyes met John Douglas', and they held a gentler look than he had ever seen in them before. There was an ethereal look in her face, he knew it was the reflex of the words to which they had both just listened. His heart was full as he bowed his head in prayer, and the shadow on his soul grew lighter.

It was indeed the voice of an angel that sang the last song.

"Glory to Thee my God this night."

The day was fading, it was past five o'clock; the rays of the setting sun glinted through the oriel window, and caught the singer's face. It was whiter than usual and the eyes were filled with light. She had been touched by a holy fire and she poured it forth in song. There was many a misty eye in that hall, and for long afterwards round Raeford they spoke of the lady with the angel's voice.

The crowd passed out.

Lady Latimere still stood by the organ like a statue, her eyes far away, the curious rapt look on her face that Miss MacLeod remembered at Nauheim. She touched her on the shoulder.

"My dear, you taught them far more by that song than any sermon will do. I thank God for your gift, use it often in His service." Without waiting for

an answer she turned away, picked up her Bible and slowly walked out of the hall.

* * * * * *

Soon after tea which they had in the drawing-room, Miss MacLeod retired to her own sitting-room. She had just established herself on the sofa and drawn a small table with her books and Sunday papers near her when there came a knock at the door.

"Come in."

It was Lady Latimere.

"May I come in for a minute. I know you are resting, but I want to ask you something."

She spoke more quickly than usual, as if there was something within that must quickly be let out.

"I did love all you said, and it made me want to do something. It's about Sir John, and what you told me yesterday. You know men are such blunderers, and they do make such muddles over their love affairs. I often think if they could be coached a bit by us women before they propose and so on to other women, they'd get on much better." Miss MacLeod smiled and nodded. "Well, if you'd let me say something to him I believe I could be a little use. May I?" the voice and face were eager. She was sitting on a stool close to the sofa.

Miss MacLeod held out her hand.

"It's very sweet of you, and I know John is so fond of you he would take anything from you in good part. If he is cross with his old aunt for talking, well, she will get over it. Yes, I relieve you from your promise of secrecy."

"Oh! thank you so," Lady Latimere looked greatly relieved. "And now have a good rest," she raised the soft hand she still held, to her lips reverently, and slipped out of the room.

Miss MacLeod closed her eyes, and a silent prayer went up, then she settled herself among her cushions and opened her Bible.

Jean had gone out with the dogs; Lady Latimere looked from room to room to make sure. There was no sign of her host either, but his cap and stick were on the table in the front hall. She went along the passage to the library. The door was half open, she saw him at the writing-table.

"Can I come in?" she closed the door behind her. He jumped up and waited for her to speak again. She was very pale but there was the same expression he had seen at the service. A great gulf separated this woman from the one under the stars, this was a friend, the other had been first a Lorelei, then a Fury. Something fell from his soul, or his senses. His quick mind remembered childish tales of black magic cloaks falling off the victims of a sorceress when she and they were released from an evil spell.

The small figure came up to the table.

"I want you to do something for your sake and mine," the voice was low and a little breathless, it sounded shy.

"Take that down and put it away or give it to me," she pointed to the Lorelei print. "It hasn't done you any good, and it might have done you horrible harm, and me, too, only luckily I am not

like that really, and I've kept my head for both of us." She smiled, but John watched her gravely. He knew this was not all.

"I was very angry last night but I am not now. I couldn't go on being so after listening to that saint, and I've been to blame, too, only I didn't mean it, and I hate being unjust, so I want to have it all out, and then we'll be quits."

She spoke more and more rapidly. John moved a chair towards her, but she shook her head. He folded his arms and looked like "dark James." What on earth was she going to say?

"I know you are not a bit happy, quite apart from me, and you just thought I'd be an exciting friend, or plaything, and help you to forget," he started and took a step forward.

"How can you think——" he began but she cut in.

"Yes, yes, don't interrupt because I know I'm right. I was furious, and that is why I punished you last night, because you see I'd never have let you, oh! well—be as you have been ever since we met if I had known there was a real some one you cared for," she paused and added slowly, "and I only knew it yesterday."

John's brows contracted into a deep single furrow between the eyes.

There was no use contradicting or hiding anything with those clear eyes upon him, and the kind look softened the shock of her words.

"How did you know?" he spoke very low.

"I asked your aunt straight out if there was no one you wanted to marry and she told me. You are

not to be cross or think she gave you away. She loves you so, and she does so long to see you happy. Now listen to me. First put that thing away," she jerked her head towards the wall, "and all the ridiculous ideas it's put into your head. They are just as much legend as the Lorelei herself. Neither I nor any other woman will make you forget Mrs. Errington. I've seen her and she is not the sort of woman a man forgets. Besides which how can you even want to try to? If one really wants something one holds on till one gets it—at least I do. I suppose I ought to be flattered you experimented with me, and now I'm no longer cross I can laugh over it," she saw John's grim face relax a little. "Don't be cross instead of me. You don't know how hard it has been to come and 'beard the lion in his den, the Douglas in his hall,' and say all this and get above board again, but it's just because I'd hate to feel I'd done you harm and I would like to help—see?"

She held out her hand. He took it between both his.

"I don't know what to say. You've heaped such coals of fire on my head and I deserve nothing but cold water. Only it isn't quite true to say I merely looked on you as an experiment. I don't deny I was very sore, and clutched at any one who made me forget, but only you could have made me wish to go on trying. You know that's true," he bent towards her, and his glance was very penetrating.

"Yes, I believe that," she said simply.

Her eyes went round the room, she walked up to the photograph of Mrs. Errington that John had apostrophised the night before. It was full length

in evening dress, and the wonderful eyes looked straight at her.

"You are a very tiresome woman, and I could shake you with pleasure, but I think you will be captured in the end," she looked at John with a little laugh.

Instinct told her to give a lighter turn to their interview, although she knew he did not resent her knowledge nor her speaking. She put the photograph back and turned to him.

"But you've got to be clever and patient and it will all come right; remember Jacob, it took him fourteen years, and when it does you can telegraph to me 'und das hat mit ihrem Singen die Lorelei gethan,' it would be quite nice for the poor thing to feel she had done one good deed with her fatal voice. Now take her down, please." She pointed to the picture.

"Must I really? I am so fond of her."

"Nonsense! I don't leave the room till you do."

"All the more reason to let her hang."

"Sir John Douglas, you have only just had the sentence of death remitted, take care it is not re-imposed," there was rather a set look about the chiselled mouth.

He jumped on to the writing-table. In another moment the frame was in Lady Latimere's hands.

"I won't trust you with her. You'll put her in a cupboard and when you feel depressed and hopeless you'll go and have a look and all the mischief will begin again, so I'll just take her, and you shall have her back as a wedding present."

It was impossible to be angry or even annoyed with Lady Latimere. She was so fearless and straight, she had the directness of a child, and when she chose she could be intensely sympathetic.

John Douglas wondered if this could be the same woman that but a few hours ago he had held in his arms and fiercely kissed. Now he had no desire even to touch her. He didn't quite know what had happened; if it was merely that he was still numb from last night's events, or whether the fact that she knew all about his secret had altered his feelings towards her. In the bottom of his heart he knew there was a great relief that she did know, and that she was still his friend.

She went towards the door with the print under her arm.

"Now cheer up, because I've quite forgiven you, and if you want any more advice I can give you lots," she said. John took her free hand and this time he kissed it.

"Bless you, my lady dear, I can never, never thank you enough, but I'll try and be worthy of your friendship and confidence."

That evening when they said good-night Lady Latimere had a moment alone with Miss MacLeod.

"It's all right, I sowed a seed, he wasn't a bit cross with you or me."

"Mrs. Errington is coming here on Saturday. I have not told him or Jean yet," answered her hostess.

"Well, I should tell him to-morrow, for fear he makes plans to go away."

Miss MacLeod nodded, and they wished each other good-night.

* * * * * *

The Raeford family all felt rather flat next day. Lady Latimere left early to catch the London express.

As she said good-bye to John on the doorstep she looked straight at him, but there was no question in her eyes.

"Remember Jacob," was all she said.

Later in the day Miss MacLeod told her nephew and niece of Mary Errington's intended visit. Jean gave a delighted exclamation, John merely said "That's all right," but his aunt's quick eye could not trace pleasure or the reverse from his face.

He announced his intention of going to Douglas Tower for two or three nights the next day. Donald had to be shown how to alter the position of some butts, they had also to decide on certain patches of heather to be burnt before next season. It was pleasanter to do all this while the weather was still good and the days fairly long, as it meant a long walk round the marches.

He felt a few days solitude and long hours tramping would restore him quicker to his normal self than anything else. After all the excitement and various phases of the last week his world was rather empty. He had little hope that Mary Errington's visit would do anything to re-fill it, anyway he had better get himself well in hand before she came.

The old Tower was silent and empty in atmosphere the following evening. John Douglas sat in a big chair beside the log fire, smoking and cursorily

reading a newspaper. The place was curiously haunted by the memory of the last day he had spent there, and now and again Lady Latimere's magnetic eyes rose before him. She was not a woman that a man could forget either, though her frank friendship made it easier to put away the remembrance of the other side of her personality, also there was no further mystery about her either, she had herself dashed it all away.

He threw the paper down, and pulled the iron chain that acted as bell-rope.

"You can clear away, Kirsty."

"Yes, Sir John," Kirsty always waited for a lead before embarking in talk with her master. She had not failed to notice that the laird looked tired with haggard lines about his eyes. Somehow to-night the sound of his old nurse bustling about soothed and comforted him. When she had removed the cloth he looked up.

"Sit down a minute, Kirsty, and have a crack. I've hardly had a word with you since the Twelfth."

"Ye're that busy with all yon English folk," Kirsty's intonation of the word English implied they were people beyond the pale. She sat opposite him, very straight on the edge of an upright chair.

"And how's the lady? I've never set eyes on her all summer." Kirsty in her extreme youth before she began her nursery career had been schoolroom maid to John's mother and aunt.

"She's much better, and last Sunday she actually had a service, and spoke herself, and I never heard her better."

"I like well to hear Miss MacLeod, though I'm no one for much church going. It's often those that sits in their pews like clockwork on the Sabbaths that rings queer chimes in the week days; but that's no our lady's way, and she's a saint and would make a Christian out of any old sinner."

John smiled.

"You'd better come back on Friday with me and stay over Sunday for a bit of a change, as she won't be up here this autumn. You'd see Mrs. Errington and wee Hal too as they are coming on Saturday."

"Ay, she's a nice lady that, puir soul, and she so young too to be wantin' her man. It will be two years since she was up at the Tower."

"Can Donald manage hisself?" her master unconsciously relapsed into good Scots when he cracked with Kirsty.

"Fine, Sir John, and it does him a hankle of good to fend for hissel now and again, and no aye have a woman running at his heels."

"It does us all good, Kirsty, and makes us value all you women the more afterwards," his eyes twinkled.

"Aye, but it isna every man that has a woman to see to him, and the sooner my young master gets one the better."

"'I'm ow're young to marry yet,'" hummed John in a bass voice.

He knew from experience that once let Kirsty loose on the subject of matrimony either for Jean or himself there was no stopping the flow.

"Young? and you rising thirty-two! Well, if it

is no soon, it will no be your old Kirsty to dandle your first born."

He threw back his head and laughed.

"Why, you're good for another twenty years at least, you silly old croaker."

"Humph!" quoth she, "maybe, but it's a pity when a man's only a father when he should be a grandfather." Kirsty was fond of oracular sayings.

"Well, you get Jean married off first and then I'll follow suit."

"Miss Jean indeed, she's worse than yourself. She'd sooner dandle a puppy or a kitten nor a bairn. I've talked till I'm vexed with her, but it was like that when she was wee, never a doll could she bide but always beasts of some kind."

"Well, we'll just be an old bachelor brother and sister." He thought it time to change the subject before she returned to the charge. "Look here, Kirsty, can I have breakfast at eight to-morrow, and will you tell Donald we'll start at nine. We'll take a bite with us. I mean to go to the west march, and we may as well take our guns and Nero in case we can pick up anything for the pot."

"Very well, Sir John," Kirsty at once stood up. This was an order and she again the servant. But her motherly heart was concerned at his tired look. "Beg pardon, Sir John, but ye'll no be walking yourself to death. Sakes, for ye're white about the gills. If I was still my laddie's nanny I'd give him a pill the night and keep him warm and quiet the morn, and he'd go to the hills a new man the day after."

He stood up and put his hand on her shoulder.

"You are a kind old soul, bless you, and you are always your laddie's nanny but it's no pills I'm wanting, but hill winds and exercise—and sleep, and the one will bring the other. Call me at seven, will you, and now good-night as you must get your dishes washed up."

"And what for is he no sleeping?" muttered Kirsty to herself over the sink. "Some woman for sure. I am just jalousin if it's no yon white faced English beesom they made such a fuss o'. She had queer like eyes, the kind that makes a fool o' the best of men."

She raised her voice.

"Donald, away to your bed, for ye'll need all your legs the morn. The laird's gaun to the wester march, and yer to have the guns and the black beast" (dogs and horses were all beasts to Kirsty) "waitin' on him by nine o'clock."

A grunt came in reply, a heavy step crossed the kitchen and clumped up the wooden stair. Before she had finished wiping the dishes the sound of long snores came from above.

"I wish your master was doing the same," she sighed, as she put out the light in the kitchen, and peeped along the passage. There was a chink of light under the door of the dining room.

The bag was full for the pot when John and his henchman returned the following afternoon. The day had been fine and calm, with a touch of frost in the early morning; the hillsides were splashed with gold and red, here and there by a burnside a rowan

tree glowed crimson. In the course of their walk they had picked up a few grouse, two snipe, two woodcock and a hare. They had climbed a long steep ridge, for the march fence ran along the top of the wester rig, the highest ground in all that country side, and over 2,000 feet above sea level. The view had been magnificent. Away to the south lay the long line of Scotland's barrier, the Cheviots, and Carter Fell rose clear and blue. Range upon range of hills, folding one upon the other billowed out to the far west, and towards the east a long green plain punctuated here and there by single hill mounds stretched towards the North Sea.

It was impossible for any cobwebs of the valleys to remain round a man's senses in such surroundings. John Douglas felt himself being washed morally clean by the hill winds. His spirits rose, something of hope stirred in his heart. Life was so fair, the world so beautiful, it was not possible that the highest gift of all should be eternally denied him.

At lunch-time, sitting on the hillside and Donald out of sight, he took a small letter case from his breast pocket. From within he drew a little snapshot photograph of Mary Errington. Unknown to anyone he had carried this for two years. Jean had done it one day at Raeford.

"I will never give up hope as long as we are both alive and you are alone," was his unspoken thought.

That night he slept as sound as Donald, without the snores.

Jean had come into Mrs. Errington's room before dinner. They had just tucked Hal into bed in the dressing-room opening out of his mother's bedroom. His fair curly hair lay like a mop on the pillow, and his great dark eyes, like hers, blinked up at them.

"Go to sleep soon, darling, we've had a long journey, and there are lots of nice things you'll want to do to-morrow."

She bent over and kissed him tenderly.

"Good-night, Mummy darling, come and kiss me when you go to bed, cos it makes me dream nice. Good-night, Jolly Jean," this was Hal's special name and conferred as a great honour. They had laughed and left him to go to sleep.

"Mary, dear, it is good to see you here again." Jean's voice was warm.

"And it's good to be here again," the other replied. "How well Marny looks, too, and what a relief for you and John."

"I wish you'd been here last Sunday. We had a lovely service in the hall, and Marny spoke so wonderfully. We had the organ and Laura Latimere sang like an archangel, it was such a treat for the people."

"And how did the Latimere visit go off?" Mary Errington remembered Jean's letter from Hardene, and intentionally threw a fly.

"Oh! most successfully, he was here till Saturday, and everyone liked him so much. The shooting was quite good, and nice weather. The only contretemps was the last drive on the first day. Lord Latimere's loader let off his second gun by mistake, and nearly

blew the Latimeres to smithereens. Mercifully neither of them were touched but it frightened us all to fits. John and I were in the next butt, I shall never forget it."

"Good gracious! how awful!"

"They behaved like bricks, in fact they were the only two who were neither frightened nor even flustered. The loader was peagreen, John was ashen, old Richardson was purple and I felt grey."

"No wonder. Did she sing much?"

"Lots. The Fergusons were here, so Emily accompanied her on the piano and I on the organ. I think she enjoyed her time here, and everyone fell in love with her."

"What about John?" Mrs. Errington smiled. "You remember what you wrote to me from Hardene."

"Oh, yes! Well, I don't quite know. He was a great deal with her, and Saturday night he took her up to star gaze, and when they came back they were both chattering. They said from cold, but as it was not a bit a cold night and they both had huge coats on I wondered if it was from emotion besides cold." Jean laughed. "No, I am only chaffing. I'm much too fond of Laura Latimere to think she'd let him make an ass of himself, and if I am not sure about him I am absolutely so about her. I mean if he is attracted by more than ordinary friendship to her she wouldn't encourage him, and she is so easy and natural I'm sure there is nothing in it."

"Yes, but all that would not prevent his being in love with her."

"Well, he's come back from the Tower in apparently capital spirits, and not at all like a love sick swain, and he is so pleased you and Hal have come."

"Oh!" Mary clasped a small row of pearls round her neck and picked up her handkerchief. There was a faint smell of violets as she did so. She had dismissed her maid when they returned from Hal's room.

The gong had sounded, the two women went downstairs.

John Douglas led his guest into dinner. On the way he pressed the hand that lay on his arm with his left hand.

"Welcome back to Raeford, dear," he looked down into the upturned eyes, "don't banish us again for so long."

"I hope not."

He had no further speech alone with her that evening. Now and again he watched her, as she sat working and talking to his aunt. Jean was playing soft organ music. A month in the Western Highlands by the sea had given a bloom to the pensive face he had not seen there for several years. There was a brightness about her that reflected itself in the magnificent eyes. He loved listening to the quiet voice, and the peculiar calm and restfulness that was one of her characteristics, laid its touch of peace upon his heart.

If Lady Latimere was like quicksilver and infected others round her, Mrs. Errington was the direct opposite, yet she was full of energy and strength, but it was controlled by method.

She, too, in her inobtrusive way was taking stock of her host. He looked thin, and there was something fine drawn about the face. His manner to her was different again from what she had noticed in London, and at the ball that night. It was quite easy but instinct told her that deeper down, currents were being held in strong leash.

Something had happened since she had last seen him, of that she was convinced, but so far she had no clue to what it was. He looked and seemed in good spirits. If he was fond of Lady Latimere was she kinder to him than Jean thought? Mary Errington's opinion of her cousin's insight was not very high. How could it be when she had never suspected John's devotion to herself?

Kirsty had returned with her master on the Friday, so on Monday morning John proposed she should be taken back to the Tower, and that Mrs. Errington and Hal and Jean should come too and make a day out. He would drive them in the big motor.

Once there Hal was set to fish in the burn with Jean as ghillie, and worm as bait.

"He won't catch anything, but it will amuse him to try, and Jean will see he doesn't come to any harm. I want to take you up the hill a bit."

They had had an early lunch at the Tower and were not to start home till four o'clock.

"Very well," Mrs. Errington answered. "Jean, don't let Hal bother you, as he is quite safe by himself and he can put on worms all right."

"I'm going to fish, too, just to show John burn trout can be caught in October, and Hal and I will

have them fried in oatmeal for tea when we get home."

Away by themselves a slight veil fell between John and his companion. They each knew the other's thought. It was two years since she had been to the Tower, and it was soon after her last visit to Raeford that John had first asked her to marry him. He had told her then how it was that day by the burn side he had realised that she was the only woman in the world to him, and how nearly he had opened his heart to her there and then.

Ah! he had travelled far since that day, and some of the road had been steep and stony; he had learnt much, too, and lately he had tasted the fruit of the tree of knowledge for good and evil. A longing rose to tell her all this but he pushed it back, he was still too near the events of a week ago. He must do penance; and be completely shriven before he again dared ask this woman to share his life. His confidence in himself had been shaken, he had fallen, and in his own eyes had forfeited the right to plead with her—yet awhile. He was in the back water, like the prince in the Lorelei tale, and no thanks to him that he had not been completely drowned. He could, however, be thankful that Mary had neither blue eyes nor square hips.

She drew him on to talk about the Latimeres; he pointed out the butt in the distance where the episode happened that was so near a ghastly tragedy. There was a slight restraint in his manner, and she wondered if he changed the subject consciously.

Mary Errington was human and womanlike; she

longed to know the truth, but how to find out puzzled even her instinctive brain. The fear of direct personal questions barred her from that road.

She was thankful that anyway from Jean's description John was in safe hands, but the idea of his being in love with another woman, and one with whom marriage was out of the question, made her think much more about him than she had ever done before. The truth was she funked the burden of his unhappiness and risk of wreckage on her conscience. To all there comes a point at which conscience cowers, Mary Errington had reached hers.

"I had such an odd dream about you last Saturday night," they were walking back to the Tower, "I dreamt that you were drowning and calling to me for help. Your voice was so loud, calling 'Mary, Mary,' that I woke up with a jump. Was anything wrong with you?"

"Saturday night did you say? What sort of hour?"

"Oh! quite early. I'd been out all day and I was so tired and sleepy I went to bed about half-past nine, and to sleep at once, so it must have been between eleven and twelve."

John frowned a little. She knew the look. It meant he was perturbed in some way.

"I was in the library. It's an odd coincidence, or mental telepathy perhaps, but about then I took up your photograph, and I believe I said 'Mary, Mary,' to it. But if you wake up every time I do that, you won't get much sleep." She should know that much.

He had been sharply startled by her dream. What between Loreleis and whirlpools, back waters, dreams and voices, he wondered if he was John Douglas in the twentieth century, or a visionary of the middle ages come to life.

"How funny!" she spoke in a musing way. Why had he taken up her photograph and spoken to it? Saturday was the night he had taken his guest to the observatory. Perhaps her dream was not so far wrong, and he had needed help. She knew now that if anything had been between him and Lady Latimere it happened then.

"Well, if you were in the library you couldn't have been drowning in water. I hope it wasn't in spirits," she smiled. She had given him an opening, and something beneath his surface had quivered.

"No, I was quite sober, I promise you. There weren't even any spirits in the room." He paused. "If ever I was drowning would you save me?" He could not deny himself from asking this.

"Yes, if you were in real danger. It would have to be mental or moral drowning though, not watery, as I can't swim."

"I shall remember that, so keep the life-belt ready," he looked so hard at her she was forced to meet his eyes. The furrow between them had smoothed away and there was a light in them made her heart beat faster for a moment.

Whatever was or was not John Douglas had not changed much. Mary wondered if she was glad.

All the next day John noticed that their guest

avoided being alone with him. Either she had letters to write, or Hal was there, or she sought Jean as companion.

Mary Errington had need, too, of a backwater. She dared not push out into the strong flowing river, she would look at it from the still waters of her present life a while longer, to make quite sure she was brave enough for the plunge. Once in, there would be no drawing back, and she was not ready yet. One thing, of which her visit to Raeford, coupled with her second sight had assured her, was that if John had been in danger, it had passed; this gave her time, but it had left a sense of responsibility on her for him that moved her strongly.

A few months ago her avoidance of him would have depressed him to the depths, but now he fought it bravely. In some ways it made things easier. He had no intention of speaking of love or marriage to her. Nothing should mar her first return to Raeford. She should learn to feel herself safe from personal claims when alone with him.

He would show her in a hundred silent ways that he was her sure friend and counsellor should she need such, a sympathetic companion, a playmate, above all that she was still foremost in his heart and thoughts. For the moment that was sufficient unto the day for the good thereof.

Often the thought of Lady Latimere came to him, but rather in the guise of his confidante than of the woman who had bewitched him. Her own hand had shattered the spell. Only now and again in his sleep he heard the sound of her singing, and remembered.

Hal was in his mother's room lapping up his supper of milk and biscuits.

"Mummy darling, must we go away on Thursday? It is so love-ally here and I do want to fish more, and ride Skylark. Long John says he'll give her to me for my very, very own. Can I? Oh! please say yes." Hal always gave his friends nicknames, adjectives stood to him instead of prefixes.

"But, darling, you've got Samson at home. Aren't you fond of him?"

"Oh! yes, but he is so slow and he can't gallop like Skylark, or jump. We jumped the ladder with bushes stuck in it lots of times this morning and I never falled off. I think I could hunt properly on her," this in a very solemn voice as if it were a sacred rite. Hal was brought up in the strict traditions of his race.

"Well, we'll see. I only hope you did not ask John for her."

"Oh! no, he said it all by himself." A long pull at the milk mug. "I do love Long John, don't you, Mummy? Do make him come home with us like he used to." Douglas had been Hal's special playfellow since babyhood.

His mother smiled and sighed.

"Perhaps he'll come again this winter. Now, hurry up, sweetheart, for it's bedtime."

The child scrambled into her lap and threw his arms round her neck.

"And I can have Skylark, can't I?" he coaxed. "I'll give Samson to Billy, he wants him awful." Billy was the rector's son, aged six, and envious of

many of Hal's possessions, who found the younger boy quite a useful rubbish heap for discarded gods.

"I'll talk to John about it," she had carried him to his bed and covered him up.

"Now quick to sleep, or there will be no Skylarks."

The following day John Douglas took the law into his own hands. He was not going to be avoided, or sandwiched between Jean or Hal, on this last day of Mary's visit.

He found her alone in the drawing-room shortly before luncheon.

"I've got to go to a farm about six miles away this afternoon. Do you feel inclined for a short drive? It's quite a good road and I'd like to take you out in my new little two-seater." This would show there could be no third.

"Yes, certainly I should like it. What time shall you start?"

"Oh! about half-past two if that suits you."

Jean said she would look after Hal. As his mother was about to step into the motor, the boy rushed at her and whispered in her ear.

She nodded, and dropped a kiss on his curls.

An unaccountable spasm of jealous pain crossed the man's mind who sat in the driving seat. Would any child of his ever receive such a smile and kiss from this woman?

As soon as they started John asked her whether he might give Hal the pony.

Mary thanked him, but made a slight demur.

"There's no child here to use the pony," he re-

plied rather shortly. "You must let him take her." So it was settled.

"I hope you will come to Barham this winter and see him ride her, and have a mount yourself. I've got a horse you'll love. He pulls my arms off but he's a wonderful hunter. Besides which I want your help and advice about a big new steading and some cow houses on the home farm. They must be renewed next spring, and I want some outside advice beyond old Taylor's, who, good man as he is, is rather antiquated."

"Of course I will," his cloud vanished. It was something to be definitely asked to go to Barham, still more to be of use.

They talked for a few minutes on estate matters.

Motoring is never conducive to sustained conversation. The rapid motion through the air in an open car lulls people to silence; besides which in those who do not drive themselves is an instinct not to speak to the man at the wheel, especially on narrow tortuous Scottish roads. Silence fell between the two, except for a desultory remark now and again, but it was a silence of harmony.

The farmer was in his shirt sleeves in the byre. The business did not take more than five minutes. Mary wondered if it had been an excuse for the drive.

"He's my only Liberal tenant," explained John as they drove away, "so I wanted to ask him to take the chair at a meeting of the land campaign the end of this month. He speaks quite well and is neither a crank nor a ranter. He's risen from being a shepherd and now he farms this four hundred acre farm,

and pays his rent like clockwork. That's the class of man to keep on the land; and his wife and daughters can milk cows and sort hens; no French and piano-playing in that house. I've no patience with that idiotic clap-trap of 'Back to the land.' Once a man has left the country for the town he never comes back or if he does, he is no use, and his womenkind are worse, but I do believe in making it worth their while to keep the good men on the land."

"You are as much a Radical as ever?" Politics between these two had never got beyond the realm of chaff. Mary in former days would declare John Douglas to be the greatest aristocrat she knew, with powers of autocracy to boot. So he was in sentiment, and could, therefore, afford to be a Radical in political principle.

"More so. It's only a question of justice and of degree. We old landowners have had a jolly good time for several hundred years, especially in Scotland. Like the French general who said to some one who sympathised with him over Sedan and the fall of the second Empire, 'Eh bien nous nous sommes diablement bien amusés pendant dix-huit ans.' Let's give the other dogs a chance. We all had a beginning some time or other. My ancestors were cattle lifters, yours were probably sheep stealers. Besides which I'd rather go gracefully down my own stair and voluntarily out of the front door, than hold on till I'm swung from a back window, and that is what it will come to if we hang on too patently and too selfishly. If we give up something of our free wills, we are much more likely to get better terms, and

something left, than if we wait till its pull devil pull baker. But it's difficult to make one's own class see this. My poor neighbours here look on me as a dangerous criminal in politics, and if they only knew I'm befriending them. You see I keep plenty of wolfish selfishness under my sheepskin exterior."

"You and I would never agree over politics," she smiled in return.

"Shouldn't we?" he slowed down for a few yards and turned his head towards her, their eyes met, and a faint colour crept into her cheeks. "I should try and convert you, and you me, and we'd get so engrossed in each other's conversion we'd forget the reasons that divided us. Besides which they are not very great. Think of all the kind things you do for your poor villagers and retainers and people round you, well, you do it from kindness of heart, or charity —beastly word. If I do anything I do it from a queer notion of justice. You believe God made two creations of human beings, upper and lower, I believe He only made one, and the others we make ourselves. God makes masses, man makes classes, as old Kirsty would say, if she was politically inclined."

Mary Errington laughed out loud.

"You certainly put it quaintly. I can't argue now as I wish you to give your undivided attention to the road, these blind corners give me fits, so never mind my heterodox views on creation."

But in his silence as in his talk she felt a sense of security. He on his part knew he had given her confidence and that she was no longer shy of being

alone with him. Further than that he dared not think.

It seemed a long time since Lady Latimere's visit, though it was only ten days since she left. He had had one friendly note from her since her departure.

Sitting here by the real woman of his life, the stream of the backwater began to run faster, and John Douglas knew that very shortly he would strike the river again, and swim for his life.

It was as well Mrs. Errington kept to Thursday for her return home.

Late that evening John Douglas slipped along to his aunt's room. He did this sometimes, a remnant of his school-boy days when he wished to make sure of being alone with her. She was sitting before the fire, "doing her reading" they called it as children.

Miss MacLeod greeted him with a quick smile and word of welcome. He had not come like this since their first return from Nauheim. He threw himself down on the sofa near her chair.

"We had a nice little drive, and yesterday up at the Tower was jolly, too. It's like old times to see Mary and the boy here again."

"Yes, and how much younger and better she looks. I think the mainspring must be much stronger now," his aunt looked into the fire. She did not want to force his confidence, yet she was sure he had come to her to-night with a purpose, and a word might help him to get it out.

"I say, Marny, do you remember once we talked at Nauheim, no, it was Frankfort, and you told me to hold on and I might win yet. Well, all this

summer I let go, and that's why I've been such a surly beast, and like a wild boar, too, dashing my head from one stone wall to another, and I've just come here to-night to say I'm going to hold on again. It's no use trying to forget. I'm not fit to black her boots in any case, but if I did forget I should deserve to be shot. So as usual I'm going to take your advice."

He sat forward on the sofa, his elbows on his knees, his face resting between his hands, his eyes down. Miss MacLeod touched the wavy brown hair. Her voice was husky.

"My darling boy, I am so thankful. It's like an answer to many prayers. I knew all was not well with you and my heart has ached many a time. You were so shut away too and iron barred, but I felt when you wanted to, you would come to your old Marny. God bless you and help you. And remember one thing, be patient and give her lots of time."

"No fear," he looked up and took the soft hand in his, "and I'll do my best not to frighten nor hurry her. Good-night, Marny dear. I feel ten years younger in the last few minutes."

"Mary will have to reckon with me if she does not make you happy." There were tears in the old blue eyes as they looked up into the ones above her.

When John had gone away, a silvery head bent long in prayer.

"Yes, we're always wondering, wondering how
Because we do not see
Someone—perhaps unknown and far away—
On bended knee."

CHAPTER VIII

THE RESCUE

DURING the third week of November John Douglas walked into his club in St. James' Street. He was due at Barham on the twenty-first, and he had come up to London a week before.

The six weeks that had elapsed since Mrs. Errington's departure from Raeford had been busy ones; he had firmly determined he would take his life in his hand to "lose or win it all" on his visit to Barham. He had so far prepared the road by now and again writing to her, or showing her some small attention which could either be construed as the truth, or as a mere evidence of friendly thought. Some times she answered his notes, sometimes she didn't.

He had also resolved that if things went ill, he would go on a big game expedition and be lost to sight and sound for many months, among African wilds or Indian jungles. If Mary Errington would have none of him, England was not large enough to hold them both. It would come hard on his aunt and his sister, but for this he could not be blamed.

Secretly he laid all his plans for a long absence;

he would take nothing for granted, possibly it might bring him luck, besides which the announcement of going into the wilds of the earth for an indefinite period might be a useful factor in persuading Mrs. Errington to capitulate.

It should be no empty argument. This time if she proved obdurate he would seek the uttermost ends of the earth. If his presence was powerless to move her, the only chance left him was absence. He would leave no step unturned to win the way for happiness for them both.

He stood a moment in the hall of the club, looking at his watch. The hall porter came up to him.

"Beg pardon, Sir John, but a gentleman left this note for you half-an-hour ago, and said if you came in before luncheon would you ring him up at the Naval and Military, as he'd be there till half past two."

Douglas opened the letter. It was from Lord Latimere, saying he had driven past him that morning, so he hoped he had run him to ground, to ask if he'd come down the following day for the deferred covert shoot at Hardene. It had been put off from the earlier date, owing to his sister Evelyn's serious illness while staying with them. She was now much better, the birds must be shot as soon as possible. There was a spare place, and it would be a great pleasure as well as a help if he would come and fill it.

He read the note once again, while his inner mind debated its decision. The Latimeres had asked him to the first date when they were at Raeford, but he had refused. He had four days in hand, and nothing

particular to do in London; he could easily spare two nights. Nothing would so perfectly assure him of his restored balance as seeing Lady Latimere again; he had no fear of the result.

He turned to the hall porter.

"Ring up the Naval and Military, will you, and ask if Lord Latimere is in the club if he will speak to me? I'll wait here."

The man bowed and went to the telephone box. In a few minutes he returned saying Lord Latimere was at the other end.

The usual telephone talk of a series of "Hullo's" and "Are you there" then took place, but the gist of the matter was quickly settled, and John Douglas arranged to go down to Hardene the next afternoon in time for tea.

He then wrote a telegram to Jean to send his guns off by that night's express and his servant would meet them at Euston in the morning. He had not expected to do any shooting during his short visit, so he had not brought them.

There was no party at Hardene. George Latimere, Admiral Howard, a former mess-mate of Lord Latimere's, and John Douglas, were the only guests, as the other guns were near neighbours.

Evelyn Latimere had been seriously ill with bronchitis three weeks before, while on a visit to her brother; the original covert shoot and party had been put off in consequence; most of the guests had been engaged elsewhere at the later date. Miss Latimere was still at Hardene, and though convalescent was not yet allowed downstairs.

"I've been doing sick nurse for the last three weeks," said Lady Latimere to John as she handed him a cup of tea, shortly after his arrival. "I'm rather a good nurse and very strict."

"I can well believe it," he answered, "but Miss Latimere is better now I hope? Do you get long enough off duty to come out with the guns to-morrow?"

"I shall come out a bit after lunch. I am so glad George is here, as you and he are old friends."

"Yes, indeed, and I haven't seen him for two years or more, but I saw his children here last summer."

"Ah! I remember," for an instant her eyes fell, it recalled the night of the stars.

She was not quite sure how it would be between them, at this their first meeting. She would do what she could to make it easy and friendly, though the elf in her raised its head and whispered temptation to see if he was completely cured. She wondered if he would ask her to sing.

John, on his part, felt a curious impatience to skip the next three days and get to Barham. The sight of Lady Latimere brought back so much; his empty heart and life, his pain and the mad search to quell it. He hoped if he was alone with her she would give him an opening to speak of what lay on his mind, he hardly liked to start the subject himself.

The chance came the next day when his hostess joined them after lunch.

She had stood beside him at a stand and a good one, and they were walking to the next covert.

"And how are you getting on?" The voice was sympathetic and conveyed her meaning. John looked down and met her eyes.

"So far, so good. I try to live up to your advice. I'm going to Barham the end of this week."

"And you have not seen Mrs. Errington since she was at Raeford?"

"No."

"What a pity I can't give her some advice, she needs it more than you do," she smiled. "All the same it's often dangerous for one woman to advise another on matrimony; you men are different."

"My only chance is that no one should ever speak to her about me, as if she thought anyone knew or was watching it would be hopeless. Not even Marny has ever mentioned it to her, and she knows her better than anyone."

"Does Mrs. Errington know you are here?"

"No, I don't think she even knows I've come south. I was going to telegraph and write to her from London to-morrow evening and tell her I shall arrive at Barham from there on Saturday. I thought I would go back to London to-morrow after shooting if Latimere does not mind, as I've some things to do early Saturday morning."

"Certainly, just as you like," her voice was a little absent. Her quick mind resolved Mrs. Errington should know of his visit, and she hoped it would appear as if John Douglas had purposely hidden it from her. She knew Miss Merton was staying at that moment close to Barham with friends of Mrs.

Errington's, that she had met her once or twice, and was going to lunch at Barham in a day's time. Miss Merton of course knew the Douglas family were great friends of Mrs. Errington's. It would be quite sufficient to mention John Douglas as shooting at Hardene in a letter to Miss Merton for the news to filter through before his arrival. Since Nauheim Lady Latimere and Miss Merton had become great friends, and when not together, corresponded a good deal with each other, that is to say, Miss Merton wrote four letters to Lady Latimere's one; writing was not the latter's strong point, and she was extremely vague and haphazard about letters.

If she could not give Mrs. Errington advice she could at least try to rouse her interest; some instinct told her that Mary Errington was aware of an intimate friendship between this man and herself. It could do no harm to play to this idea, and it might hasten events.

So that night a letter left Hardene, another messenger of fate for John Douglas, as his sister's had been several months before.

That evening Lady Latimere gave way to the elf. She purposely put on the black velvet she had worn the night at Raeford when she had sung "Aime moi" at John's request, in her hair was a small diamond chain that bound the dainty head like a chaplet.

It would be as well he should know if he was completely beyond her reach. She would only test him. If he showed a quiver of past remembrance she would be generous, and never exert her power again. There are few women who having tasted conquest can volun-

tarily relinquish it without finding out if they still wield some of its power.

Of course he asked her to sing.

"It won't be much of a performance, as I have no one to accompany me."

She went to the piano in the great blue drawing-room and sang a few old English ballads and simple little songs, but she threw a world of tenderness and pathos into them.

The memory of the first time he had heard her voice came back to him, and a vision of the whirlpool rose dark and wild. But no wish to return into it stirred him, only the knowledge that all his life he would remember the singer and the voice, what had been and what might have been, the escape from which he owed entirely to her.

There was something of humility as well as gratitude in his eyes as she bade him good-night. She had been quick to see that some emotion was at work.

"Thank you," he held her hand, there was no one else in the room. "The legend is true so far that having once heard, one does not forget. I never shall, nor want to, for all that you have taught me. Mercifully for me the Lorelei of to-day has grown more compassionate than her forbear."

The beautiful mouth smiled a little sadly as she replied:

"I shall never sing *to* you again, only for you. You too have taught me something I shall not forget, and I am grateful for the lesson. Will you write and tell me how you fare at Barham? I want it so to come all right."

He bowed and his voice was husky.

"If any happiness comes to me, it will be you who helped me to reach it."

She did not answer except by a friendly smile, and John watched her pass out of the room.

It was nearly dinner time on Saturday evening when John Douglas arrived at Barham. The butler was an old friend and welcomed him warmly. A year or more had passed since his last visit, and so much had happened during the time, it seemed more like ten.

"Anyone staying here, King?" he asked as he followed the butler upstairs.

"Only Miss Spencer, Sir John; she's been with Mrs. Errington since the beginning of the 'unting season, and 'as her own two 'orses here."

Miss Spencer was a young cousin of Mrs. Errington's, and frequently at Barham. A pleasant red-haired girl, a good rider, and devoted to Mary and the boy. Mrs. Errington having been an only child, and her mother the same before her, was singularly devoid of relations, though she made up for it by many friends. Miss Spencer's mother had been the sister of Mary's father, Sir Henry Abercromby; he and her mother had both died before Mary was fifteen, and she had lived with the Spencers until she married Harry Errington.

The Abercromby baronetcy and entailed estates had passed on Sir Henry's death to an elderly cousin, though Mary had inherited a considerable sum of money from both her parents.

Douglas knew Una Spencer well and had always found her a cheerful companion, and full of tact, but at this moment he wished her elsewhere. He supposed, however, he could hardly expect to be tête-à-tête with Mrs. Errington under the circumstances, though in the days before his courtship he had often stayed alone at Barham with her.

Why it should be permissible for a woman to entertain a man alone in her own house, where after all liberty of action is much greater than elsewhere, while to travel or go to an hotel, even for twenty-four hours, with the same man be sufficient to damn her socially, or make people talk, is one of those intricate problems of worldly morality that baffles all logic.

John made a hurried toilette and found the two women in the drawing-room.

"I'm so sorry I'm late, but they kept us waiting at the junction for the down express." He had shaken hands with both, and stood with his back to the fire, looking at Mrs. Errington. The faintest colour had risen in her face as he entered the room.

There was always something vitalising in his presence, an alert quick strength in his movements that communicated itself to others, and Mary Errington was conscious of it now.

He on his part felt the rush of life race through him as he stood beside her. He had left the backwater, and the strength of the strong swimmer rose in him to reach the figure that stood on the other side of the flowing stream. How hard it would be to exercise any patience, and neither to hurry or frighten her.

She was dressed in a teagown of a soft deep shade

of violet, open enough at the neck to show the white throat, her hair gathered into coils set off the shape of the head, and the beautiful eyes under their dark brows were full of light and life.

They went into dinner. The room was completely panelled in dark oak with a few old family portraits inset. The more modern pictures, including a full length portrait of Harry Errington and one of Mary, were in the hall, which was the favourite sitting place of every one who came to Barham.

"There was a friend of yours here at lunch to-day," Mrs. Errington said, while the fish was being handed.

"And who was that? Man or woman?"

"Woman." She wondered if he would speak of his visit to the Latimeres. Miss Merton had passed on the news of his being at Hardene, as her friend had felt sure she would. If he did not mention it, Mrs. Errington would draw her own conclusions. She would give him a chance.

"I never can guess conundrums. Who was it?"

"Miss Merton, Lady Latimere's friend. She came over with the Arbuthnots, so we had a mutual bond in you."

"Oh! Miss Merton. Nice woman. She and Lady Latimere and I went several expeditions at Nauheim. I've just been at Hardene for two days. Latimere ran across me in London by chance, and asked me down for their covert shoot which had been put off on account of his sister's illness. Very good it was too. Six hundred head the first day, and five hundred the second. There was no party, only George Latimere and Admiral Howard and some

neighbours. No ladies, except Lady Latimere, as Miss Latimere is still there in her room."

All this in a perfectly natural voice and manner. Mary Errington smiled inwardly, and knew she was glad he had spoken of his visit to Hardene of his own accord.

There was no word alone with her that evening, though Una Spencer immersed herself in the newspapers in a corner of the smoking room where they sat after dinner.

It was probably as well, though it taxed John Douglas' patience sorely. He wondered how he should ever find the right moment with the Titian-haired Una in constant attendance.

Hal burst into John's room by eight next morning, and his dressing was somewhat impeded by the small visitor. Everything on the dressing table had to be examined and explained, all the pins, studs and links inspected, interspersed by long tales of Skylark and her wonderful feats.

"We all hunt to-morrow," he announced, "and I've got real cord breeches and box cloth gaiters and a new whip. Mummy's going to give you the Khedive to ride, he does gallop and he pulls dreadful sometimes, but I specs your stronger than Mummy."

"Come along, youngster now, and take me to breakfast." The two came hand-in-hand into the dining-room.

Mary was already there, alone.

"Are you going to take me to church this morning?" asked John.

"Yes, if you'll come. You and Hal and I will go

by the short cut as it's fine. I don't think Una is coming."

This was better. Hal was too small to be in the way, and would probably run back and forward most of the time. It would at any rate give him the sense of being alone with her.

The talk during the mile to church was mostly on trivial outside matters, but through it all ran a vein of an under-current, and the interest and understanding that John threw into all his questions and remarks did not pass unheeded by his companion.

After lunch the usual rite of Sunday stables took place; afterwards John suggested a further inspection of farm animals and the buildings she wished to alter and improve.

It was nearly half-past four when they returned towards the house.

It stood out well in the dimming evening light, the old red brick face covered here and there with ivy, and the mullion windows telling their own tale of age. Part of it was Elizabethan, and the wings had been added in the time of Queen Anne. There was a blend of dignity and comfort about Barham both inside and out, that stamped it a home as well as a house. A wide sweep of lawn in front, the parapeted terrace ran the whole length of the house, and made it stand well up above the surrounding park.

Suddenly along the avenue came a motor. They stopped and watched it draw up under the big stone portico.

"Visitors, what a bore," said John, who had foreseen a possible half-hour alone with Mary before tea.

"I can't think who it can be, it was too far off for me to recognise more than that it was a man, and he's evidently gone in."

The motor had moved off in the opposite direction, evidently to go to the stables.

"Who is it, King?" Mary asked as the butler held the door open; he had seen them coming in the distance, after disposing of the visitor.

"Captain Fitzgerald, ma'am. I've shown him into the drawing-room, and Miss Spencer is there."

John fancied a shade of annoyance crossed Mary's face.

"Who is he?" he asked.

"Oh! a young man who has come into the country this season with his mother. They've taken the old Manor House and he has very good horses and rides hard. He's Irish, and very nice and amusing—quite an acquisition to the hunt. He was here the last two months of last season and liked this country so much that he's brought his mother this year. He was in the army, but he's left it now and has a place in Ireland." She turned to the butler, who was still in the outer hall. "Bring tea at once, please."

They found Una Spencer and Captain Fitzgerald in the semi-light of the white drawing-room. Mary turned up the electric light as she went in.

The young man was Irish in looks as well as name, with a sleek head of jet-black hair and intensely blue eyes. He had a fresh complexion and a small fair moustache, and being tall and slight, he was undoubtedly good-looking. There was a hint of brogue in his speech.

"I hope you don't mind me dropping in like this, Mrs. Errington, but I've been over to see a chap who's wanting to sell me some fox terrier pups, about twenty miles from here, so I ventured to come in on my way back."

"Not at all," Mrs. Errington replied, "Will you be out to-morrow?"

"Indeed I will, and trying a new horse that looks as if he'd just come from an Irish fair, all hair," he laughed and showed a row of white teeth.

He seemed a pleasant enough fellow, thought John, with a touch of blarney about him. Soon after tea he asked for his car, and just as he was saying good-bye to his hostess John heard him lower his voice.

"Can I have a moment's talk with you, Mrs. Errington?"

"Yes, certainly," and Mary went out of the room with him.

What the devil could the fellow want private speech with her for? thought Douglas, and longed to kick him out of the house.

The drawing-room opened out of the big hall; he could see the two in earnest conversation as they stood by the high carved oak mantelpiece. Mary was smiling but shaking her head; finally he saw Captain Fitzgerald raise her hand to his lips.

A muttered "Damn him" escaped the onlooker. He turned sharply to the newspaper table and picked up the *Field*.

"Did you speak?" said Una, who had returned to the big chair by the fire with a book.

"Not that I know of," a pause. "Who is this fellow Fitzgerald?" There was a sharp tone in his voice.

She gave the same account as Mary.

"He's so nice too and very Irish and amusing. He's very devoted to Mary and always coming to her for help and advice about his horses and dogs."

"Humph!" grunted John, and seeing the hall was empty of the intruder he passed through it to the smoking room and slammed the door.

The very idea of any man being possibly on the same quest as himself made him hot all over, and in a fever of rage and impatience.

All that evening Mary was conscious of a cloud over her guest. He talked and laughed, but with visible effort; in between whiles he was absent, and looked as near cross as his manners allowed. That something had upset him was evident, but what could it be? Mary Errington was far too guileless and unselfconscious to guess.

The next day's events did not mend matters.

The first person who came up to them at the meet was Captain Fitzgerald, mounted on his hairy horse.

"Did ye ever see the like?" he laughed in a broad brogue, after wishing the two ladies good morning, "and wouldn't he be a fine advertisement for a hair restorer?" The grey threw his head, and a long mane and forelock waved in the wind. "Look at his tail and his heels, but if he can gallop and lep we can soon alter his looks."

John, in irreproachable breeches and boots and red

coat, mounted on a powerful good-looking brown, gave the Irishman a freezing nod.

Little Hal was on his other side on Skylark in charge of Davis the stud groom.

The morning was dull and cold, the meet was at an out-of-the-way place, so the field was small.

The Barham party had arrived a little late; they had not long to wait before going off to draw.

The Master was an old friend of John's and greeted him warmly.

"I'm glad to see you out again, Douglas, only wish we were in a better bit of country to-day, but I hope you'll be out again on Wednesday."

"I'm only at Barham for a day or two, and fear this may be my only day."

"I see Mrs. Errington has mounted you on the Khedive. Hope you'll persuade her to sell him; he's more of a man's horse than a woman's, and he pulls her to pieces, though he's a grand fencer. Of course she has the gift of making horses go well with her that would puzzle many a man to ride. I don't believe that chestnut she is riding to-day would go with anybody else as he does with her."

"Yes, I often wish she would not ride such wild brutes, but they are so good-looking and she's so fond of them it's difficult to get her to part with them. However, thanks for the hint, and I'll see if I can persuade her to sell the Khedive to a friend of mine who asked me to keep my eyes open, and who does not mind this sort of horse."

Someone else coming up on the Master's other side to talk to him, John dropped back into a walk.

In another few moments Mrs. Errington rode up alongside of him; they were jogging down a road to the first covert.

His eyes dwelt on her. The beautiful seat, the quiet hands, the perfect turn-out of both rider and horse pleased his fastidious eye. His mind shot back to the summer, and the shock of seeing Lady Latimere astride. Here was his ideal horse-woman, and he knew her courage and riding were a match to her appearance.

She was mounted on a beautiful thoroughbred chestnut with a blaze face, his mane plaited and a bang tail, he looked good enough to win a big race. He was very much on his toes, but bending to her light hand; evidently they both thoroughly understood each other.

Una and Fitzgerald were some way behind.

"I've had another bridle put on the Khedive, in the hopes he won't pull you as hard as he does me."

"I expect he'll find my weight and my arms a bit different to yours;" he looked at her. "Do you know it's nearly two years since I've seen you on a horse in full fig, and you look better than ever."

She smiled. "I don't think you've seen Prince Charlie since he was a four-year-old, and he's a very flattering horse to ride."

They soon found a fox, but it was only a short gallop; there was very little scent, and the first hunt fizzled out into nothing.

What between a new bridle and a man riding fourteen stone on his back, the Khedive pulled less than

usual, and in the few fences they jumped John Douglas knew he was on something above the average.

It was a long four mile jog to the next draw. This time Fitzgerald rode alongside of Mrs. Errington talking and laughing, or now and again coming closer and talking almost in her ear. He had changed on to his own horse, a long tailed thoroughbred bay, and with his swallow-tail coat, yellow waistcoat and very fashionable bunchy hunting tie and highly-polished hat, he looked very smart.

John rode for a bit with Una Spencer, till another cavalier coming up to her, he pressed the Khedive's sides and cantered on to overtake Mary. He had had enough of this Irishman; and he would ride him off. He pulled up by Mrs. Errington's side and at once made her talk to him. There was at times a strong vein of mastery in John Douglas and it rose uppermost now. He was angered too at the thought that this probably went on every hunting day; if so people must notice. It does not take much in the hunting field to set tongues wagging, especially if the woman is young and attractive. He ground his teeth and vowed he'd know the truth one way or another that night. All his resolves of patience and forbearance went by the board at this new turn of events, and he was more deeply in love with Mary Errington than ever he had been before. The joy and pleasure of the day's sport were gone for him. He cared not if hounds ran or if they didn't, except that when they did, it was an outlet to feel a strong horse galloping under him. He and the Khedive

took on some fairly big places in the only decent run they had towards the close of the day.

They ended up five miles from Barham; the irrepressible Fitzgerald riding back three miles with them, but as John held closely by Mrs. Errington, the Irishman rode mostly with Miss Spencer.

Douglas' temper was none of the rosiest when he came down to dinner. He found Mary alone.

"Una has got such a bad headache she's gone to bed," she said.

"God bless Una," said John in his heart.

He offered Mary his arm.

How charming she looked! The day's air and exercise had given her rose cheeks and lips; the man's whole being stirred at the nearness to her.

At dinner they talked hunting and horses. He praised the Khedive highly and offered to buy him for his friend. He was far too strong a horse for a woman, and must be tiring. Jim Broughton was well off and would give whatever Mrs. Errington put on the horse.

"I gave £200 for him last February, he's rising six. I think he's worth £250, and he's learnt a lot since I've had him."

"Very well, I'll take him for Broughton at that. I don't like your riding horses that can pull like he does."

They had moved into the smoking room and were having coffee.

Mary smiled. "I don't mind parting with him, not because he pulls, but he has not the quality I like."

She pushed an armchair nearer the fire. John stepped forward.

"Let me do that for you. Is that right?"

"Thank you," she sank down into it, the coffee tray was close beside her on a small table. She had told the servant to leave it in the room, remembering that John sometimes liked a second helping after a long day out. He watched her stirring her cup. She had slender white hands, but full of strength and character. John had always loved watching them, they were so white, and so quick and deft whatever they did. A splendid diamond half-hoop sparkled next her wedding ring as her left hand played with the spoon. She finished her coffee and put the cup down on the tray. It was slightly behind her chair.

He stood leaning against the mantelpiece looking down on her while he smoked a cigarette. He still felt out of temper, and restless, longing to turn the conversation on to Fitzgerald.

Mary had picked up the evening paper. She read out one or two items of news. There came a pause. She was conscious of a strain in the atmosphere. She wondered what could be the reason of his cloud. Like all sensitive high-strung people she was unusually quick to feel the mental atmosphere round her, especially of those she knew intimately. So little did she connect his present state with herself she began to wonder if after all the Latimere episode had passed by. Yet when he arrived on Saturday he had been his usual self.

"I'm thinking of giving a little dance for Una at New Year. I've never done anything of the sort

for her, and they did so much for me. I've funked it up till now, but I think I must. If I do, will you and Jean come and help me?" She looked at him; he had never seen her eyes more beautiful.

"I'm sure Jean will, but I'm afraid I can't. I'm going on a big game trip and I shall have started by then."

He had not meant to announce it like this, but his day of misery and jealousy had got the upper hand.

She raised a pair of startled eyes.

"Are you really? Where to?"

"East Africa to begin with," his tone was very short.

"And what do Marny and Jean say?"

"They don't know yet. There's no use announcing plans weeks before and being fussed over. I had not fully made up my mind when I left home, but now I have, so I shall tell them next week when I go back. It never takes me long to start, and I made my plans so that I could go at short notice."

Mary lowered her eyes. There must be some cause for this resolve, but unconnected with her. When she had refused him before, he had made no attempt to go abroad.

"Will you be long away?" Her voice was very quiet.

"Six months I daresay, or more, it depends how the spirit moves me."

As her eyes were down he watched her narrowly, but he could detect nothing, in fact she seemed quite indifferent. Mary Errington was a good actress when she chose. John Douglas entirely puzzled her.

From his behaviour at Raeford and for the first day of his visit here she was sure he still cared for her, yet without any rebuff on her part he calmly announced a long absence. She knew there was a hidden reason.

Meanwhile her quiet acceptance and apparent indifference goaded him.

"You won't want me, you'll have Jean and Una, and your new friend Fitzgerald should be a good A.D.C., and he seems quite at home here. What's his mother like? Does she ride?"

Find out something of this skeleton in the cupboard he would. There was a sharpness in his voice that made Mary look up from her work for a moment. She raised her eyebrows.

"Oh! dear no, she is rather delicate, so one place is much the same to her as another. She's a dear little thing, and adores her Frank, and quite happy keeping house for him."

A glimmer of the truth had dawned on her. For a moment a bubble of mischief rose. So John was jealous.

"Why do you dislike Captain Fitzgerald?"

She would take the bull by the horns.

"I don't dislike him, only I think he's a bit free and easy with you, as you ask me;" he tried to speak casually, but failed utterly. There was a strong vibration in his voice.

"I'm sorry you don't like him, as only to-day I promised to m———" As she spoke a shower of sparks flew out from the wood fire; she pushed her chair back quickly and the last word was drowned in

a crash of falling china and jingle of silver, as the chair caught the edge of the coffee tray and upset it. Mary jumped to her feet, and shook one or two sparks off her black velvet teagown.

"Good heavens! what a mess! Do ring the bell."

Coffee, hot milk, cream, broken cups were streaming over the floor.

John had muttered "Good God!" but his words and his white face had nothing to do with the coffee tray.

He did not speak, and started to pick up the pieces. The butler soon appeared, and in a few moments he and the footman removed the débris. When the door closed John heard himself say:

"Do you mean you are going to marry Fitzgerald?"

Mary walked up to him and stared in his face.

"My dear John, are you raving?" his look frightened her. He was ashen white, his eyes quite black, and a single vein stood out on his forehead like a whipcord. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"You said," he spoke slowly as if with difficulty, and he held her eyes with his, "that you were sorry I did not like him as only to-day you had promised to marry him, I thought you said, and then the tray upset."

Even the look in the set face before her could not prevent Mary Errington from going off into a peal of laughter. John bit his lip and a deep furrow showed between his eyes. How dared she laugh?

"You dear old silly, I said 'motor,' not 'marry.' He asked me to give him a lift to the meet on Wed-

nesday and I said I would. I meant I was sorry you did not like him, as of course you'll still be here and going with us. I am thankful you told me what you thought I said, as we might have gone on playing at cross purposes and come to real loggerheads."

As she spoke, his face cleared as if by magic; never had she seen such a transfiguration. It touched her deeply. He put his hand to his eyes for a moment as if clearing something away. He gave a little unnatural choking sound that was meant for a laugh as he said:

"By Jove! You gave me a fright, Mary, that time. I couldn't quite believe my ears, but the way the fellow was here yesterday and hung about you whenever he could all to-day set me so on edge I didn't know what to think."

"You don't deserve to be confided in, if you thought I'd announce such a thing in that off-hand way. But I will tell you to make up for your fright and you must never let on. No, it's Una he's in love with, not me, and he confides in me, and uses me as a stalking horse. He's so afraid of rushing her, as he's only known her three weeks. He went head over heels the second day. However, I told him yesterday he must now show his hand and make his own running. I think Una quite likes him, but she has no idea he's in love with her. He is well off and his own father, and I think he is really a good fellow and would make her happy. I know lots of people who know him, and men (except you) like him, which is always a good sign."

They were both standing by the mantelpiece. The

man's pulses were hammering in his throat and temples. He could not let such a chance slip. Her head came up to his shoulder, and the star-like eyes with the green and brown depths were smiling into his. He moved a step nearer, and the faint smell of violets he always associated with her made him draw his breath sharply. He knew he was close to the verdict of life or death.

"Thank you," he said gravely, "thank heaven it's Una, for even if you had no thought for him it was unbearable to think he dared lift his eyes to you, and I hated that people might be talking."

Now that the cloud had been dispersed, Mary's mind leapt back to his previous conversation. She too had something to find out.

"Well, now you can be at rest about Fitzgerald, and you needn't taboo him any more." There was a moment's pause. She was looking into the fire. "Are you really going abroad?"

In common fairness after two rebuffs and what she had just read in his face, it was her turn to help him out. She knew John's pride. Something in her voice, in the downcast eyes, made his heart leap.

"I'm sure you are much more useful at home than hunting lions and elephants. Think how Marny and Jean will miss you, and how are we to carry out all your building ideas that you gave me to-day if the architect is in East Africa?"

The tone was playful but conveyed an invitation.

John bent forward and took both her hands.

"Mary, don't torture me, do you mean you are asking me to stay? because I can only do so on one

condition. England isn't big enough for us both apart, that's why I was going. For God's sake, tell me if I may stay—with you."

The last words were a choked whisper. She looked up, in her eyes were unshed tears, she nodded gently.

"Yes, stay," she whispered back.

"Mary, belovèd," his arms closed round her, he felt her head on his shoulder. "You know what this means, that you will marry me. Let me look into your dear eyes and hear you really say it."

Slowly her head went up, and the dark eyes and the grey ones looked into each other's depths.

"Yes, I will marry you, dear."

"But I want more than that. Do you love me?"

For a moment her eyes fell, and the colour rushed into the soft pale face. Then she looked up bravely.

"I am very, very fond of you, John dear, so much so I cannot let you go wandering far away by yourself. I don't pretend to be in love with you, it wouldn't be true or kind if I said I was."

"Will you give me the chance of teaching you to love me, darling? for unless you steel yourself against me I swear I will; but if you can't promise to try and care more than you do now, then not even now, holding you like this, can I take the precious gift you offer me."

Thus John Douglas put his idealism to a practical test.

She saw his jaw set, and his nostrils dilate a little.

They were still standing; his one arm round her, the other holding her hand against the lapel of his coat.

"Yes, that I can promise you, I will try and learn."

Then for answer he bent his head and sought her lips, passionately but gently. He felt his very soul rush up to his own in that first long kiss.

"That is the seal of the compact, my darling," he murmured, "and you shall never regret to-night if I can help it."

He drew her down on to the sofa opposite the fire.

"You must give me half-an-hour now. You are not tired, are you?" he asked tenderly, "and I've so much to ask and hear and tell, and as I don't know if I'm drunk or dreaming, or whether I'm on my head or my heels, I don't know where to begin."

He was holding her hand in both his own and raised it to his lips. With her other hand she touched his hair a moment.

"You know you are a great baby. You've been so cross and glum since Sunday evening, just like a spoilt child."

"But I am a spoilt child now since I've got the present I've been asking for for two long years." He tried to slip his arm round her. She edged away.

"They'll be bringing the tray in a moment, and then if we are sitting like John and Mary below stairs we shall jump as if we were shot!"

"Oh! confound the servants! I quite agree with my old padre Somerville who refuses to have a servant, much to the disgust of his flock, who think it indecent of a minister to do his own housework. He says servants destroy all privacy of life, and it's quite true. They always come in at the wrong moment.

I know where I shall take you for our honeymoon; to the Tower, where there is only old Kirsty, and she never comes in without knocking. You won't want any dressing-up there, so you can't want your maid. You'll come, won't you?"

Already this was a new John to Mary Errington. He even looked different. It was as if by a touch of magic some door in him had flown open. Life and light radiated from him, his eyes were full of happy laughter, the touch of his hands conveyed strength and tenderness. John Douglas was a born lover, and he meant to be loved.

"Yes, I'll come, but not in midwinter, it's too cold, so we'll wait till April."

"No, darling, you can't be so cruel as to ask me to wait so long as that. I'll keep you warm," he leant nearer and kissed her shoulder, "but we won't argue about anything to-night."

A sound at the door and he was on his feet.

"Mr. Somerville," he laughed, and stood by the fire.

The tray was duly set down.

"You need not wait, King, Sir John will put out the lights. Breakfast at half-past nine, please."

The butler bowed and withdrew.

John threw himself down beside her again.

He asked the numberless questions of all lovers since the garden of Eden. Some of the answers satisfied him, others did not. To the latter he merely said he would bide his time.

In his mind lurked the shadow of confession, in

hers the wonderment of what had happened to him these last few months.

She felt there was something they each wanted to say, and looking into his happy smiling face it was easy for her to give the lead.

"How am I to be sure you will always be like this?" she began. "You know you were quite different in London this summer; so much so I thought I was quite safe from you any more."

"Mary, you are a witch, I've always thought so. It will never be any use my trying to gammon you even if I wanted to. But what do you mean about London?"

"Oh! you didn't want to see me a bit," her eyes danced with mischief. "Confess now. You were far more taken up with taking Lady Latimere to the opera and at the ball afterwards."

"Yes, and do you know why?" his face went grave. "You shall know now, and know everything, and then you will realise how you hold my life in your hand. I was trying to forget you, because I thought it was useless, and that your 'No' was final. You know how I met Lady Latimere; well, her music and her personality were a good antidote, and I cast everything to the winds, not caring much if I wrecked her or myself so long as I forgot you. Luckily I very soon discovered there was no question of her wreckage, she was quite safe, which made me still more indifferent what happened as far as I was concerned, and I headed straight for the rocks."

His voice was not quite steady. He had taken both her hands, and there was a slight furrow between his eyes.

The smile had gone out of her face and she looked gravely up at him.

"Yes," her voice was soft, "and mercifully for you and her and me and all of us, she played square, isn't that so?"

"How do you know?"

"Partly because I guessed, partly because Jean gave me an inkling. Jean, who never suspected about you and me, somehow saw you were very attracted by Lady Latimere, so then I knew it must be pretty patent if Jean saw it. But she gave her such a good character I hoped you'd come to no harm. Thank you, dear, for telling me, because it proves to me far more than anything else that you trust me as well as love me."

"I trust you far more than I trust myself, but thank God there is nothing I cannot trust you with or about."

Then quickly and shortly John Douglas told her the tale of these pages. A great deal was left out and passed over. Perhaps could Lady Latimere have heard, now and again she would have smiled her Lorelei smile. But no one can tell in words even to their heart's nearest the gamut of feelings that play fast and loose in their soul, and John Douglas' confession to the woman he loved about his experience with the woman who wouldn't love him was true and genuine in his own eyes. Anyway he painted himself all black, and her all white, which was the only thing a gentleman would do.

"And the night she snubbed you, and put you in your place was the one you took up my photo-

graph and I heard you call 'Mary! Mary!' in my sleep, wasn't it?"

John's account of the star gazing adventure was distinctly blurry, but Mary filled up the gaps with her second sight mind. She was smiling again.

"Yes, my lady witch. I wanted you badly then."

"Well, I came very soon after, and when you asked me if I'd help to save you from drowning I said I would."

"So you have."

"Yes, but so has she. The real truth is you owe me to her, and I owe you to her, because if you had not met her, and I hadn't woke up to your danger, you and I wouldn't be like this now. It makes us much more even too. You know I used to tell you that if you'd had something else in your life it wouldn't be half so unfair. Well, now you have, and it's taught you a lot. I can see and feel it in you. I am not a bit jealous, only so thankful you fell into such good hands."

"Of course you are not jealous. I wish you were. It's only people who love who suffer from that complaint. Don't you be too easygoing though, or you'll goad me into trying to make you jealous."

She put her hand over his eyes.

"Don't look as if you were going to eat me up. If Lady Latimere sends you back the Lorelei print I shall hang it in my sitting-room, and when you are unkind to me I shall take you up to it and say I wish she had drowned you after all."

John's answer was to take her in his arms, and kiss her as passionately as he dared.

Before he allowed her to leave him Mary Errington had given him permission to let Miss MacLeod and Jean know the great news at once.

"I wish I could tell Marny myself just to see her dear old face," John had said, "but as I can't tear myself away from you for another day or two and she must know before it's a day old, there's nothing for it but a telegram."

They had also arranged that all their intimate friends should be told, and John had begged it might be announced in the papers the following week.

"Do you know the lines:

> 'I tell my secret out
> That none may be in doubt.'

It's like that you see, dear, and if I don't blazon it abroad, you might change your mind and give me the slip. You won't really keep me waiting for months, will you," he looked wistfully at her. There was a lot of the boy in this big strong man.

"What do you call months?" she smiled.

"Oh! three or four. You see there's nothing to wait for, and I've waited two years."

"Then it's nothing new to you, and a month or two more will make no difference. You might go on your big game trip and we'll be married when you come back."

His face fell.

"Don't talk like that, dear, to-night, even in fun. You don't mean it really, do you? You know the only reason I was going at all; and remember you did ask me to stay." This time his eyes twinkled.

They were standing now, Mary having declared it

was getting very late. He put both his hands on her shoulders.

"Just once before you go, say it again that I may not wake up and think I've dreamt it."

"Say what?"

"Say 'I am going to marry you, and I'll try and learn to love you.'"

She repeated the words very softly. He closed his eyes as if to drink them in more deeply.

"Amen to that," and he kissed her gently on brow and lips.

They walked together through the big hall to the foot of the stairs. The light was still lit above Harry Errington's picture. It was life size, full length in his field service uniform of khaki, painted just after he returned from South Africa with his yeomanry. The hand of death was already drawing near. There was something dreamy in the fresh young face with the light brown eyes and curly fair hair. He had never been very strong, neither in health nor in character, and young though she was when they married, for those two short years of their lives together it was Mary who had been his guide and prop. For all that, she had been devoted to him and deeply in love with him, and with his memory ever since.

John's arm was through hers, and as they passed the picture he felt her flinch a moment. He knew what was passing in her mind. He stopped.

"Darling, I understand," the words were almost a whisper, "but look and see how he is smiling at you." It was true, the eyes looked at them both, and seemed to smile more than usual.

"Listen, I'd rather tell you now, this first night of your promise to me, and perhaps it will make it easier for you, if any doubt should come to you. You know how fond he and I were of each other, I always looked on him like a younger brother. Well, the last time I came to see him here, just three weeks before he died, he told me he knew he was done for and couldn't live long. It was then he told me he had left me as an extra trustee and guardian, and he said," John paused a moment and cleared his throat. "'Promise me you'll look after Mary and the boy in whatever way is best for her. She is so young to be left, and if ever she wants to marry again, and its for her good, don't let her allow any false sentiment of my memory to stop her. When one is close to the other side as I am, one thinks differently about these sort of things. My only wish is for her to be happy.'"

John's voice was choked, and it was all he could do to get the words out. The dark head by his side was bent, and two hot tears fell on to his hand; he put his arm round her.

"Don't, I can't stand it, but I had to tell you now. It was like a sacred message I've kept for you all this time, and if it had been some one else you had chosen to marry I should have told you just the same."

"Why did you never tell me before?" she whispered.

"How could I, dear, when I was in the question. It would have been like using his message as a lever. No, you had to say 'yes' of your own free

will, unbiased even by his message, but now that you have done so, it's only right you should know, so that you may feel as long as you are doing what please God will make you happy, you have his consent and blessing. When we go back to Raeford I'll show you the bit of paper I wrote the words down on the very day he said them to me, so that I might remember them word for word in case they should ever be needed. Thank God they are."

Very quietly he drew her to him and bent his head to hers.

"It's a solemn trust that's been put into my hands, but God knows I'll do my best by you and Hal."

He felt her soft arm steal up round his neck. Her long dark eyelashes were all wet, he took his handkerchief and tenderly wiped them.

"John, dear, you've already made me happier. God bless you. I'll try and make you as happy as you want to make me."

They were at the foot of the stairs. He still held her hand, playing with the white fingers and evidently trying to say something more.

"What is it?" she looked up at him and her eyes shone like soft deep mosses after rain.

"I don't want you to think that now or after we are married I shall ever take anything for granted. Love and marriage should only give us fellows privileges, not rights, and I've got to win the privileges. Will you remember this, my Mary?"

It was delicately put but he saw she understood by the tell-tale colour that flew to her face.

"Thank you," she whispered, "it's I who am going to be the spoilt child, but I won't make too many hard conditions. If I have all the rights you shall have some of the privileges. And now, good-night; listen, there's twelve striking."

The great clock near them chimed the hour.

"Yesterday and to-day and whenever we hear the clock strike twelve we will remember to-night," for a moment he held her to him; then he stood with shining eyes and watched her go up the wide staircase.

Within the next few days the news had gone far and wide that Sir John Douglas and Mrs. Errington were engaged to be married. Everyone was delighted. It was a marriage to which there was not a "but." The genuine pleasure that her friends expressed either in writing or in person helped Mary Errington round many an awkward corner. There is nothing so helpful to want of self-confidence as the world's approbation of a halting action; in her heart Mary needed encouragement for what she had done.

John Douglas was so old a friend at Barham that the retainers knew him well. Their reception of the news pleased Mary more than anything else.

Little Hal nearly went off his head when he realised his dear John was now going to live with them, and that when not at Barham they would all be at Raeford together.

Hal's ideas on matrimony were somewhat vague, and his mother was glad that his most pertinent questions were made to her alone.

"Will he be my daddy now?" he asked.

"Yes, darling, in a way, but he won't be any different to what he has always been to you."

"Will I have brothers and sisters?" Hal had a passion for other children, especially boys, and had often begged for a brother of his own.

"Perhaps, if you are very good." Mary was thankful no one else was there, "but you must not talk about it as babies run away if they hear people talk about them before they come," this might ensure safety from further untoward remarks.

"I don't like babies; can't we get one all ready to play with me, and will John be his daddy too?" Hal puckered his forehead. "It's rather difficult. Oh! I know it's like my rabbits, do you remember, Mummy, last year Robert died and then we got Thomas, and Mrs. Robert is now Mrs. Thomas, and the black and white rabbits were Mrs. Robert's, and all the black ones are Mrs. Thomas's. Will it be like that? It is funny cos they all have one mummy and two daddies."

Her son's knowledge of natural history baffled any reply. She knew to try and baulk that little reasoning brain by the conventional refuge of telling him he would understand when he was older was worse than useless. Mercifully she also knew from experience that such conversations were reserved for moments alone with her, so she merely said:

"Yes, it's very like that," and she then turned his small mind in another direction.

Of course ecstatic telegrams had been received from Miss MacLeod and Jean.

Unbeknown to John, Mary had telegraphed again in response to theirs, begging them both to come to Barham, and had added it was to be kept as a surprise for him should they be able to do so. Late on Tuesday she received the answer that they would arrive on Saturday evening. The journey from Raeford to Barham was quite easy.

John Douglas looked as if he were treading on air, yet when alone with Mary there was something always deferential in his attitude, a touch now and again of anxious solicitude, lest she should have regrets or misgivings over her decision.

"Does it look any different in the morning light?" he had asked, "there's a lot of difference in candle light, and I want the assurance of a cold grey November day."

She looked very pale, and dark lines under her eyes as if she had not slept.

"No, it's all right," she smiled, "only I feel so shy and nervous about telling anyone and what they'll say."

They were in her sitting-room after breakfast, Una having not sufficiently recovered her headache to come down.

"Have you told Una yet?"

She shook her head.

"Well, go and do it, darling, and that will be the first fence over."

She touched his cheek for a moment with her finger tips and went out of the room.

Mary Errington always declared that the following day was the most nerve racking she had ever spent

out hunting. Congratulations and good wishes sprang out at every covertside, but it was all over in the first hour, and when John and she got a good start and kept their place among the first half-dozen in a fast gallop of thirty minutes, she began to enjoy herself again.

It was John who told the news to Fitzgerald, whose exuberant spirits knew no bounds, and he had whispered to Mary as Una was near.

"And it's a gallant lead ye're giving me and be-dad it's following it I'll be."

Mary had no further need to tell him to make his own running, and let it be said at once that within a fortnight Una Spencer was engaged to the blue-eyed Irishman.

John had announced his intention of running up to London on Thursday for two nights to see his lawyer.

Before they parted that night Mary asked whether he had written to Lady Latimere.

"No, I'm going to send her a telegram from London to-morrow. I thought the Barham Post Office would never get the words right."

"What words?"

"I told her if ever it came right for me I would telegraph to her 'Und das hat mit ihrem Singen die Lorelei gethan.'"

"Do you know how angry I have a right to be at your discussing me like that with another woman."

"Yes, sweetheart, and the angrier you are the better pleased I shall be."

"Really you are incorrigible."

Somehow Mary felt she had never known the real John before. His joyousness and gaiety were so infectious, his tender reverential love-makings were so full of chivalry and romance, he had the art of *petits soins* that is a rare attribute, and means so much to a sensitive woman. Several times that day she had looked at him in a detached and critical way, and he showed to great advantage on a horse; she had to allow to herself she liked looking at him, and that she would be quite proud to go out into the world beside him. Unconsciously John Douglas was already to the good on the first twenty-four hours.

To his telegram to Lady Latimere sent from London had come the characteristic reply:

"The picture goes to Barham to-day. God bless you.—LOREI.EI."

The business with his Scottish lawyer was quickly done. John returned to Barham on Saturday evening with several old jewel cases which had reposed in the safe of an Edinburgh bank since his mother's death. He had told the lawyer to bring them south. The one that he looked forward to giving Mary was the famous Douglas ring, that had been worn by many a Lady Douglas, and which his grandfather had had reset according to more modern ideas. It was a magnificent pigeon blood ruby cut in the shape of the Douglas heart, and the royal crown surmounting it was in small but pure water brilliants. It was a ring fit for a queen and worthy of its royal insignia.

Mary Errington met him in the hall. The house had seemed empty and dull without him. Left to

herself little demon doubts assailed her now and then, though the advent of Miss MacLeod and Jean had brought back her confidence. Their pleasure and delight were too strong not to be infectious.

"Welcome home," she held out both her hands.

He took them and bent towards her.

"Is it still all right? You don't wish I'd stayed away for good!"

"No, I'm much happier when you are here, I get frightened only when you are away."

"Absence makes the heart grow fonder—of some one else, so I'll take good care you don't get the chance," he was smiling into her eyes. "Come along to your sitting-room I want to show you something, and we need not do company to Una," he saw Mary was heading through the hall to the drawing-room.

"No, I want to show you something first, something so nice and pretty, a little surprise I've got for you since you went away." She took his hand and pulled him quickly along; then she opened the drawing-room door and pushed him in.

By the fire in a big armchair sat Miss MacLeod. Mary waited by the door, she saw her come with outstretched arms towards the tall figure that hastened forward, she heard his voice twang on a deep note of "Marny!" she saw the silver head and the brown close together, then she quietly slipped out of the room and shut the door. She knew that this was a meeting at which not even she should be present.

That afternoon after tea Miss MacLeod had told

Mary Errington many things about John, especially of the past two years, and this last summer, and of all her hopes and fears.

"I wonder you did not hate me, Marny dear," Mary had said, "because I know how you love him; and even now I feel he is giving so much, and getting comparatively little in return."

"No, dear, I understand your feelings, too, and I knew it was difficult for you; it's only we old people who because we've got further along the road can see farther ahead, and knowing John as I do, and his bright sunny nature with all its hidden depths, I felt he could make you happy if you'd give him the chance, and as you are the only woman I have ever known who would suit him, you see why I hoped and prayed so it might come right."

The sweet old face was slightly flushed and the eyes were misty. She was lying on the sofa in her room and Mary had sat beside her on a low stool close by. She had insisted on Miss MacLeod having a rest after her journey so that she might be fresh to greet her nephew.

"I'm sure your prayers have done much for both of us," Mary had replied softly.

"Yes, dear, more things are wrought by prayer than this world wots of, and I do thank God that many of mine have been so abundantly answered."

This was why Mary Errington had left Miss MacLeod to greet her boy alone.

"Isn't it all wonderful, Marny," John said, when he had established her back in her chair. "I can't quite believe it all yet."

"I should have known it by your face if I had met you in the street," his aunt smiled, and took the strong brown hand. He had drawn a small chair near hers.

"No wonder if my faces shines, but what is much more important, do you think Mary looks happy?" his eyes dwelt intent on his aunt's.

"Yes, dear, I think she does. What is more her happiness is all to come. You love her now so you are in the full summertide. Mary is still in the early spring, and you've got to lead her on into the summer."

"I know it's taken her all her courage to even give me a chance, and I shall be a fool if I don't make the most of it."

"It will be all right, dear boy. You have had patience, the rest will not be nearly so difficult. You have a free hand now. Just be yourself and you will win all you need. Oh! John, my dear, I believe I am as happy as you are."

Tears filled her eyes; he bent forward to kiss her and neither of them spoke for a few moments.

"Now, you must go and rest before dinner, and I must find Jean first, and then I want to give Mary my mother's ring; you remember it."

"The Douglas heart?"

"Yes."

"Thank God, dear, that your wife is a fitting successor to your dear mother, how I wish she were here to-day."

"So do I, and then I'd have two mothers," he

passed his arm through hers, and escorted her to the foot of the stairs.

Jean and he had a vigorous greeting. She had expressed her feelings as far as she could in her letter three days before, and she put more expression into a good hug of him than all the words on earth. Neither had he need of words, he knew his sister's love for himself, and also her devotion to Mary.

"It's splendid, isn't it, and just like her to get you and Marny here," was all he said, but he looked much more.

Then he went in search of Mary, he found her coming away from the nursery.

"You dear, getting Marny and Jean here as a surprise for me. It just makes it all rounded off. Now do come to your sitting-room for five minutes as it's my turn for showing."

The sitting-room was on the same floor as her bedroom, a charming white-panelled room, with the usual litter of knick-knacks, books, flowers and photographs of such a sanctum, though a big square knee-holed writing table in the centre told of a good deal of practical work done there too.

John closed the door, and took three jewel cases from a bag he had in his hand.

"They have not been worn since my mother wore them over twenty years ago; they are yours now."

He opened the long flat one in which lay two magnificent rows of pearls with a diamond and ruby clasp.

Mary gave a cry of delight.

"Oh! how beautiful, and I've always longed for some really good pearls."

She was wearing a white lace shirt, slightly open at the neck. He clasped them on standing behind her.

"Wear them often, won't you?"

The other large case was a splendid stomacher of diamonds and rubies, which divided into three separate brooches, a single large ruby forming the centre of each.

He took the stomacher out of her hand and laid it down, holding the ring case in his other hand. "This is the one I care most about giving you, dear." He opened it and took the ring out. The great ruby blazed bloodred as the light caught it. John Douglas felt it to be a delicate moment. He had seen she wore her usual rings on her left hand. How could he ask her to take them off to make room for his, unless she volunteered to do so of her own accord.

He took her ringless right hand, and slipped the ruby on to the third finger, then he raised it to his lips.

"Keep it there, darling, meanwhile, perhaps when we are married you will wear it on the other hand."

For a moment she hid her face against his shoulder.

"Dear, how good you are to me, you make things easy that I think are going to be difficult."

She could not let such generosity and thoughtfulness go unrewarded.

"Shut your eyes a moment," she whispered.

He did so.

"Now open them."

He saw the ruby glitter in the palm of her left hand, from which she had transferred her wedding ring, and its diamond halfhoop fellow to her right hand.

"I have promised to marry you, let me wear the Douglas insignia in its proper place for all the world to see," the small dark head went up with a touch of pride.

The human heart beside her gave a great throb as once more he took the ring and placed it on the rightful hand.

"Mary, my own dear love," he whispered as he kissed her hand, "no one has ever been so honoured in the wearing of this ring as I am now."

That evening, surrounded by the Douglas family, watching their happy smiling faces, feeling herself encircled by love and care, Mary began to wonder why she had deliberately turned aside from all that might have been hers two years ago.

Yet as she looked at John Douglas with the deepened look in his eyes she knew that what had been and was, had proved the best for them both.

CHAPTER IX

THE HAVEN

THE wind blew strongly against the old Tower one day late in October.

Lady Douglas sat working near the big log fire. Now and again as the panes rattled to the twin drumsticks of wind and rain, she raised her head. She looked at the clock, it was nearly three. The man from Raeford with the post would soon arrive.

John Douglas had gone to a distant shepherd's house, six miles over the hill; he had left directly after breakfast, saying he would be home before dark.

They had come up to the Tower for a few days complete holiday before winter set in, after a series of guests all through August and September at Raeford.

John had won his way more or less about a short engagement, and they had been married at the end of January. The wedding had been a very quiet one at Barham. They had spent the first week of the honeymoon at the Spencers' place, and then John had insisted on taking her to the Italian riviera for three weeks, to a little fishing village with the blue of the Mediterranean in front and the olive clad hills

behind. There among the sunshine and the flowers he left no stone unturned to lay siege to his wife's heart, but he did it as quietly and unobtrusively as he could. He never moved from his motto of taking nothing for granted. In outward ways he had little to complain of; if he had been ready to waive his rights he had plenty of privileges, but deep within he felt Mary gave and allowed what she did from kindness or pity and a sense of duty, rather than from love or inclination.

She was always gentle, unselfish and thoughtful; ready to meet his slightest wish, interested in all the new scenes, entering into all his plans, either for their present daily lives, or for the future, tender even in her manner to him, deeply appreciative of all his thought and devotion, but, the "but" was always there, and the man was conscious of it all the time.

He was not one of those who thought that because he had got what he wanted, his wife must necessarily be as happy as he was. He demanded and craved for at least some of the love he gave. As the weeks slipped by into months and Mary's attitude towards him was exactly the same as when they first married, his resolves of patience and waiting began to wear down a little. He wanted a response to his passionate love for her, and he wanted it quickly.

They had returned to Barham for the last month of the hunting season, and after that they had moved to Raeford.

Miss MacLeod and Jean had been established in a small house belonging to the estate about two miles

away. John and Mary had begged them to remain with them for the summer, but they had wisely insisted on making the change at once.

The newly-married couple had been twice up to London for a fortnight at a stretch, and the last time in the middle of July the Latimeres had dined with them at their hotel, and they had all gone to a play. The two women had taken good stock of each other, and had both gone away with a sense of the other's charm.

Once during the play Lady Latimere had turned to John and said in a low voice:

"Is everything all right?"

He had answered back:

"Yes, for me," but her woman's instinct saw there was a "but," she guessed that he gave a good deal more than he received, and it wasn't enough for him. As once before she felt a touch of irritation against Lady Douglas.

She begged them to come down to Hardene for a Sunday, which they did. When Mary heard her hostess sing, and saw something of her elusive, magnetic personality she fully understood how easily John might have forgotten.

She had teased him a little that Sunday asking him if he regretted he had not succeeded in forgetting her. For answer he had taken her almost roughly in his arms, and his face had gone tense with the deep furrow between the brows as he said:

"If ever you love me one little scrap, then you'll know what a hell it was when I had to try and forget you."

"But, dear, I do care for you, much more than a little scrap."

He had looked intently at her, and had said very slowly:

"The day you love me you will say so, and you won't use the words 'care for' and 'fond.' I almost hate them. When a fellow is greedy as well as hungry, and longs for a Belshazzar feast he's rather inclined to cavil at dry bread." She had lowered her eyes and said nothing. It was not often he lifted the curtain of his heart as much as this.

Unknown to her husband she had watched him that evening, and she saw how restless the singing made him.

The next morning before they left for London Lady Latimere had taken Mary to her own sitting-room to give her the address of some tailor. While she was ransacking a very untidy and littered writing table her guest looked at the Lorelei print.

"I've got the other one in my sitting-room at Raeford," she said smiling. "I won't trust John with it; it's an extraordinary likeness you know."

"Luckily not all through," had answered the other, the peculiar eyes looking straight at Lady Douglas. She held out her hand. "I did my best for him when I found out he was so unhappy about you. Now it's for you to do the rest, and no one but you can do it."

Mary Douglas had taken the outstretched hand.

"John owes you a lot, and so do I, and I'm glad we're all friends. I will do my best for him."

"He's worth it," had replied Lady Latimere, and there was a sharp note in her voice.

So the summer had passed into autumn, and by slow and imperceptible degrees Mary found herself turning more and more to her husband, referring to him about all sorts of trifles, missing him when he was away, counting on his return, and now and again spontaneously showing him little signs of demonstrative affection that should have shown them both the way things were going.

Unfortunately John took all such signs as evidences only of Mary's kindness or pity, and lately he had silently vowed he would no longer ask her any more pointed questions. She waiting to be asked began to think he was quite content with things as they were, and so the tiny rift, that if allowed to grow, ruins so many lives merely for want of the open word and complete understanding, showed its ugly rent in their sky.

Ten days before this visit to the Tower, John Douglas had been to London for a few days on business. While there he had met Lady Latimere, and had taken her to an orchestral concert. In the programme had been several of their Nauheim favourites. He had felt the same old restlessness possess him. He wondered what it was in this woman that always affected him in this way. Here he was, married to the one he loved—his mind came up against a stone wall, he could not delude himself that he was married to the woman who loved him. Something of fierce impatience rose in him, and it was the sight of this other woman that roused his

passionate sense of the denial of his heart's desire.

Lady Latimere herself had been very quiet and rather absent. She was looking white and tired. The only approach to confidence she volunteered was that she felt worried about Latimere, who in his zeal for the sea and adventure was hankering to go on an expedition to the Arctic regions, and she feared she had been very short to him on the subject. In the meanwhile he had dashed off to Genoa to see the Italian explorer who through a mutual friend had asked him to complete his party.

Looking at her face with the dark rings under the eyes that told of worry and anxiety John Douglas wondered if his wife would look like that if he were in Latimere's place; and he envied the sailor.

On his return he told Mary of his meeting with Lady Latimere and about the concert, but as the Arctic expedition had been confided to him more or less in secret he did not mention it.

Such was the position of affairs on this wild October day.

Mary Douglas got up and looked out. She wondered what Hal was doing with himself down at Raeford, and thought how pleased he would be at her and John's return to-morrow. The rain was turning to sleety snow, and already the tops of the hills were white. They looked grim and stern, but her heart went out to it all, it meant so much to her now, this wild Borderland; she longed to see a tall figure come striding through the storm, home to her.

She heard the small motor draw up with a girning sound at the door. In a few minutes Kirsty came in

with a bundle of letters and papers. She was very devoted to her new mistress, all the more so that on her visits to the Tower, Mary never brought her maid, and ladies' maids were anathema to the old woman.

"Jist useless toys wi' their fallals and their white hands," she would say with a snort.

"I do so hope Sir John won't be late, Kirsty," said Lady Douglas as she started sorting the letters, "it's going to be such a wild night. Wind always makes me jumpy, and now it's starting to snow."

"'Deed, m'lady, it's stout nerves ye'd be needin' if ye bided here a' winter. Mony's the time I think this old ruckle will be lifted off its feet before morn. Sir John kens the road blindfold. Yer ladyship'll get him home soon, never fear."

Mary's solicitude for her husband touched the softest spot in Kirsty's heart. She had thought her mistress not looking so well this time, and she had noticed that except for a short walk every day Mary stayed mostly indoors, or amused herself pottering round the place.

A burning question was in old Kirsty's heart, and many times on her lips, but she had not dared to voice it.

"And them married mair than eight month and never a sign, tut, tut, what ails them both," she had said only the night before to Donald over their supper; but Donald was very unresponsive on such matters.

Kind and thoughtful always to her servants and retainers, there was a great dignity about Lady

Douglas that would have needed even a less respecter of persons than Kirsty to break through. The old woman would talk by the ream about her master, and this Mary encouraged to her full bent.

Kirsty knew they were returning to Raeford the following day, and that this might be her last chance.

"I'm thinking Sir John and your ladyship'll no be coming for a whiley?"

"No, we shall stay at Raeford now."

"And wull ye no be going to the fox hunting?" Kirsty's idea of fox hunting was a mass of men with guns and dogs, and she having to provide a large dinner for them. The yearly fox hunt among the hills of Douglas was a great event; but she had heard that in England foxes were hunted and caught by dogs, people following on horseback, and no guns allowed, to her mind another proof of English stupidity and barbarity.

"Not just now anyway. You see, Kirsty, I must not take Sir John away too much from his own home and people, or you would all hate me," she smiled. "No, I shall be quite content at Raeford until after the New Year."

Kirsty began to feel desperate.

"Maybe your ladyship'll no be caring so much for the hunting now ye're married?"

"Oh! I'm just as fond of it as ever, and luckily for me Sir John is fond of it, too. Some day you'll have to come to Barham and see our English home and all the horses, and you shall go to a meet and then you'll see how pretty it all is."

Kirsty shot a bow at a venture.

"Ah! well, m'lady, it's hunt while ye may for aince your quiver begins to fill up wi' bairns there'll no be muckle chance o' it. Ye'll no take it amiss from me but it's aye in my heart to see my laddie's bairn before I die and I'm no as young as I was." Kirsty touched her eyes for a moment with the corner of her apron.

Mary smiled. It was not possible to be angry with this quaint old soul. After all she had been John's nurse and still looked on them all as children.

"You want to be a grandmother, don't you, Kirsty, and how you'd spoil them, worse even than you did Sir John and Miss Jean." She felt she was parrying, but she was jealous of her secret until she had shared it with him.

"Ah! weel, I'm an auld woman, and I've seen a hankle o' things in my time. I ken fine nothing makes a man so prood o' hissel as when his wife's going to have a wean, and nothing makes him so prood and fond o' her too. And what's the good o' marriage wi'out bairns."

Kirsty's point of view was always in favour of the man. To her they were the lords of creation, and women only their toys or slaves, and fit for nothing else. She would have knocked anyone flat who dared insinuate that John Douglas was fonder of his wife than she was of him. The thing would have been incredible, immoral and contrary to all the laws of nature.

Mary laughed, and turned to the fire to throw a newspaper wrapper away; she saw Kirsty was hot foot on her track.

"I'm sure you are right, and when the time comes you shall come back to the nursery for a bit and look after us all. Now I must do these letters, and I'll ring when I'm ready for William to start.

Even Kirsty was obliged to take this as a hint. She left the room not very sure whether she had found out anything or not; but feeling that she had ventured on to more delicate ground with impunity than she had yet dared broach.

"Next time maybe she'll tell me," she muttered as she went back to the kitchen, "and maybe too she'll think on what I said." Kirsty's faith in her own wisdom was unbounded.

That morning before starting John Douglas had told his wife to look through his letters if he had not returned, and if there was one from Jean to open it. It would have the London postmark. They both had strong views about opening each other's letters, and agreed it gave a much greater security to the writers if the letters were only opened—unless by special arrangement—by the one for whom they were meant.

The letter in question would say if Jean was to arrive at Raeford the next day; in that case Mary could send word back by the motor to have her room got ready.

Miss MacLeod and Jean were spending a few weeks in the former's London house, and Jean had suggested running up to Raeford for a week to stay with John and Mary.

She opened and read her own letters first, six or seven in number. There was nothing that required

an immediate answer. She turned to her husband's. They looked mostly on business, in narrow envelopes, and one or two private ones. There was a grey blue envelope, large and square with the London postmark addressed in a big rather sprawly hand, undoubtedly Jean's. Without a moment's hesitation she opened it. It was a large single sheet, one of those letters whose contents jump out at a glance. Mary's eyes froze on to the paper as she read.

"Darling,

"Do come down as soon as you get back to London. I came home yesterday and shall be alone. I know I was horrid and unkind before you went away last week, but I didn't mean it, and I can't bear the thought of you in the cold up there and me left for so long.

"Your devoted

"LORELEI."

At the top of the sheet was a double L and a coronet, and Hardene in writing alongside. The handwriting was extraordinarily like Jean's, but the letter could be from no one but Lady Latimere.

Mary felt sick and her knees shook. She stood staring at the letter, hypnotised by it till the words were branded on to her memory. She knew her husband contemplated returning to London the following week, he had told her so only two days before, and had said he might have to be away a week; in connection with a company of which he was a director. Of course she knew he had met Lady Latimere there the week before; he had told her about that and the concert. Her mind tried to remember his voice and manner, but she felt too numb to think.

A gulf of horror had opened at her feet and her world rocked.

It was inconceivable that John Douglas could be capable of such infamous double dealing, as false to the one woman as the other. In outward ways he had never varied in his manner and ways to his wife, though lately sometimes she had thought he was almost irritable, and there had been an intangible restraint between them. A hundred tiny incidents, unnoticed at the time leapt up now, charged with meaning in the light of this maddening doubt.

That very afternoon while she worked she had resolved to tell him her great secret, she wondered how she would put it, and if then he would ask her again if she loved him now. She had felt herself grow warm at the very thought.

And now? She gave a slight moan like an animal in pain.

Mechanically she picked up the envelope, no, there was no mistake. It had opened easily without tearing. She folded the letter and put it back, moistening the flap with her finger and closed it. If she died of it, it should be in silence. Her fear that he should know she knew was even greater than her fear for their future lives. In that wild agonising moment Mary Douglas realised how passionately she was in love with him.

It had grown so imperceptibly; she herself could not have said when affection and friendship had merged into the deeper channels of other feelings, but this glaring searchlight of pain had revealed it all. Womanlike she blamed herself for not having

shown him more clearly how he had won his way. If he was too proud to go on asking, too blind to see, what right had she to have been too proud to withhold what he so craved, the knowledge of her love. The misery of it all, and at such a time when she had meant to make him so happy.

Her brain felt tottering. There must be some mistake, the letter must be for some one else, but who? Every word fitted in exactly with all that had happened, the evidence was there in deadly black and white. The words that stung fiercest were: "I can't bear to think of you in the cold up there," she felt sure they did not refer to the weather, but to her. Lady Latimere's own words to her in the summer at Hardene flashed up: "It is for you to do the rest, no one but you can do it;" she understood the hidden meaning now. "Love him, you fool, or you will lose him." She remembered too how restless that wonderful singing had made him, even then, with her there. Surely though John must have known there was a likeness between the two writings, and in that case he would not have told her to open his letters; then she remembered that he had once said what a bad correspondent Lady Latimere was, and how he had only had about two notes from her since he had met her; he had probably never noticed the likeness to Jean's writing. Link by link her mind, groping darkly, forged the chain till the evidence seemed overwhelming, and every loophole of a mistake closed like an iron door.

If this blow had fallen before she loved him it would not have been so impossible to face. Then

she would have had her anger, her pride to support her, but love knocks away all outer supports, and leaves a woman's heart such as Mary Douglas's defenceless, agonising in its love, and quivering in its shame. She bent her head in her hands, and her slight body shook with tearless shudders as she prayed in a semi-conscious way for strength to face what lay before her.

The clock struck. It was half-past four. She felt she must pull herself together. She got up, looked at herself for a moment in a little old mirror on the wall, and rang the bell. It was getting dusk in the room, Kirsty would notice nothing. Mary felt so cold she knew she must be white.

"This is a note for William to take back with the orders for to-morrow, that's all, thank you. You need only bring one lamp, I've got rather a headache and don't want too much light."

Kirsty ejaculated sympathy, and in a few minutes brought in a lamp that she set on the centre table.

"I'll be bringing your ladyship's tea now? It will do yer head good."

"No, thank you, I'll wait till Sir John returns. Don't say anything to him, it's only neuralgia."

She heard her own voice as in a dream, her throat was dry and a dull singing in her ears, her body felt numb and lifeless. Dimly the words John had said to her at Hardene came back, she wondered if any hell could be worse than this, that of doubt, and treachery and unfaith.

The daylight was almost gone. She heard some

one at the front door, and a clumping of feet, then steps coming up the stone stair.

Her very heart stood still, she wondered if she would have felt like that if she had been told John was dead, and she knew there are far worse things than death.

Again she tried to think there must be some mistake, but the burning words danced before her eyes, and she could fit them to no one but him. The door opened.

"Hullo, darling, here I am, I hope you didn't think I was lost. This infernal snow came on pretty thick, I won't come in as I'm sopping. Tell Kirsty to bring tea, I'll be down in twenty minutes. I must have a tub."

She had turned round in her chair, her face was quite in shadow.

"All right," she managed to say.

In a few minutes when she heard the splashing in the bathroom, she went along to her bedroom and mixing a headache powder with a strong dose of sal volatile gulped it down. She must do something to keep herself going.

She was standing by the fire when John came in. He looked glowing with health and vigor after his buffeting and his bath. She almost hated his good looks.

He came up and kissed her. He too had taken a resolve that day, and had left his pride among the snowy hills. He would be a suppliant once more and find out where he stood.

"There, sweetheart, I'm clean and dry again,

come along and give me my tea, and tell me what you've been doing all day." She gave a little shiver and turned to the table. She wished now she had let Kirsty bring her tea before, she could not touch anything feeling like this. Before she could answer, he added quickly:

"What's the matter, dear, you are as white as a sheet. Has old Sir James been paying you a visit? Bar chaff, I am a fool to bring you up here in this cold," he held out his hand to her.

"Oh! it's nothing. It's only one of my stupid heads and they take the stuffing out of me sometimes. I expect it's the sudden cold."

As long as she had a valid reason it wouldn't be so hard to keep the mask on. At this moment she felt as if her head and heart must ache till she was dead.

"I am so sorry, it's all my fault. Well, thank goodness, we'll be home to-morrow. I'd never have brought you if I had known this beastly snow was coming so early, but three days ago it was so lovely."

He knew she had bad headaches sometimes, and they made her very quiet and disinclined to talk. He noticed she ate nothing and just sipped at her tea. She asked him a few questions about his walk. When he had finished he suggested she should come and lie down in her room and be tucked up with a hot bottle and a quilt.

"I'd rather sit quietly here by the fire," she said. She must be there when he read his letters to watch his face.

Somewhere in her innermost mind she clung to

the illusion of a mistake—her heart holding the field against her head.

John fetched the waste paper basket, picked up his letters and threw himself down into a deep arm-chair, the opposite side of the fireplace to her. Mary's knitting lay in her lap. She shaded her eyes with one hand. He noticed how white it was.

"Was there anything from Jean?"

"No." Mary bent forward to poke the fire.

He had opened the letters as they came and tore them up, or laid them aside according to their needs. She saw he had come to the fatal one.

"This looks like Jean?"

Every pulse in Mary's body hammered or stood still, she was not sure which. No man on earth could be such an actor, there must be some mistake which she could not understand. Her look was rivetted on his face, but her hand was over her eyes.

He gave a low whistle as he read; she saw him turn the letter over, read it again, shake his head and smile, and then pick up the envelope to examine it.

Mary watched breathless. After all she had been through she now dared not believe the light was breaking.

He gave a little laugh.

"I say, dear, is your headache very bad, because you'll have to help me. It's like a hard case in Vanity Fair. The letter I thought was Jean's is from that dear little slapdash Lady Latimere, who I believe often muddles her letters, and this one is certainly not for me. I'm pretty sure it's for Lati-

mere, and he probably is scowling over one beginning 'Dear Sir John' or 'Dear Courier.' I can follow the gist of it. What am I to do, as one can't pretend not to have read a clear few words on one sheet like this that hits you between the eyes at a glance. I am amused she signs it 'Lorelei,' snub for me as I called her that first and now she uses it to someone else." He held the letter out to Mary.

She had sat up in her chair, staring at him. Her face was white, the eyes almost fixed, she struggled to her feet, a piteous little smile broke round her set lips, she felt the room swing round and everything come up black; she held out her hands towards him, and as she staggered forward he caught her. The violent reaction after her two hours misery and torture had been too much for her.

"Good heavens! what is the matter?"

Tenderly he laid her down on the sofa, then he tore at the bell. Kirsty came running in.

"Quick, her ladyship's not well, bring some brandy and water," but the faint had only lasted a moment and Mary reopened her eyes as Kirsty left the room.

John was kneeling beside her, trying to undo the collar of her silk shirt. She smiled at him and whispered:

"I'll be all right in a minute."

He had laid her quite flat, and had put the cushions under her feet to raise them. His aunt's faints had taught him first aid in such cases.

"Sip this, darling," he put his arm under her head as he held a glass with a little weak brandy

and water to her lips. Kirsty had also brought a smelling saltsbottle and a quilt which she threw over her.

"I'll get some hot bottles to her," and she left the room.

Already a tinge of colour had come back to cheeks and lips. She held out a hand as if to find John's and when she felt his strong warm clasp she carried it to her lips and held it there.

Kirsty came in with two hot bottles in her arms. One she placed at Mary's feet, and the other she laid on her left side.

"I'm all right now, Kirsty, thank you, and I don't need anything more."

"I'm thinking I'll no need to be asking your ladyship any mair questions," she said in a low voice as she bent over her. Mary's smile and the look in her eyes quite satisfied Kirsty. The door closed after the portly form.

She raised herself a little and asked John to put a cushion under her head.

"I'm really all right. Oh! do forgive me."

She turned her head into his shoulder, he was still kneeling close to her.

"Forgive you, what for? For frightening me like that?"

"No, no, much worse than that, for doubting you."

"Doubting me?" He bent anxiously over her, thinking she was still light-headed. "Now don't talk just yet."

"No, I'm not talking nonsense. I wish I was,

but the last few hours have been like some awful nightmare, and now you've woke me up I can't rest till I've told you. It was all that," she pointed to the letter that lay open on the floor as it had fallen from his hand. She moved closer to him like a child seeking shelter.

"You won't be angry will you if I tell you everything, though I deserve anything as I ought to have trusted you blindfold. You see you told me to open anything from Jean, and that is so like her writing and the London postmark and all, so I did, and of course I knew who it was from, and I couldn't understand. I tried to think it must be a mistake, but it was so horribly clear and fitted in exactly with last week and your going back next and being up here in the cold. Oh! John, you don't know what it was like. I didn't think I could feel so much." His arm had tightened round her, and could she have seen his face, the set stern look would have told how stirred he was.

"You thought that letter was to me, Mary," there was a world of pain in his voice.

"Oh! don't speak like that, if you only knew what I'm feeling now, because since you've said there is some mistake, that's the worst part to feel I could have doubted you." Her voice shook. "And I'd been so happy all afternoon waiting for you, and thinking of lots of nice happy things, and old Kirsty and I had a talk about you, and then this happened." She put both her hands to her face, he saw the flash of the smaller Douglas ring he had given her, the old one being too large for every day wear.

"I didn't think after all these months you'd have thought so badly of me as all that, however little you care for me," his voice was very low with none of its usual vibration. He felt as if he had been hit in some vital part.

"Don't, don't, you must understand and then you'll forgive me. You see I thought perhaps I hadn't showed you enough how much I did care, and how I was learning to love you," she felt his arm give a start, "and I thought perhaps you'd got impatient and tired of waiting like you did before. Oh! I thought all sorts of mad bad things, but the only thing that mattered is I felt like I did because, because," her voice went to a whisper, "I love you," she sat up and threw herself on to his neck, hiding her face on his shoulder. His arms closed round her.

"Mary, my own dear wife at last," he whispered passionately, "those three words wipe out everything. Never mind what you thought me capable of, don't let's talk of anything now but what you've just said."

He raised her face with his hand and looked long and deep into her eyes.

"At last," and he kissed the beautiful windows through which he had seen her heart.

She made way for him to sit on the sofa.

"You see, sweetheart, we've been playing at cross purposes for some time, I like a stupid dull boy, and you like a proud little girl. I got afraid of boring you by going on asking if you were learning to love me. You see from the very day we were engaged you were always so sweet and gentle and good to

me, and I knew it was just pity and duty and your sense of fair play, everything in fact but love, and whenever I did ask you, you just said you were very fond of me, or you didn't regret having married me, so about two months ago I vowed I'd ask you no more questions."

She smiled up at him.

"And here was your poor Mary waiting to be asked, as it wasn't for me to come and throw myself at your head, and I tried to show you in lots of little ways."

"Yes, darling, but I'm a blundering blind idiot often, and how could I distinguish the meaning of your ways when they'd always been so sweet and dear. We chaps aren't subtle like you women. Well, to-day on the hill I determined I'd come asking and begging again, little knowing what a high-class blackguard my wife had found me out to be," he gave a happy little laugh. "By Jove! it's the Lorelei again, she made you marry me, and now she's made you love me. God bless her."

"No, I have loved you long before to-day, only that thing," she pointed, "made me realise how much."

Her husband bent forward and picked the letter up.

"I'd like to frame it in gold and precious stones. I don't think I can send it back to her. Don't you think I may keep it! You see I asked your advice what I was to do about it."

"I think you must return it, but you might make a copy," she smiled and then threw out both her hands as if to ward off something horrible. "No,

no, I want no more memory of it than those two awful hours. Do you know what I remembered too. How at Hardene you said to me if ever I loved you one little scrap I'd understand what a hell you'd been through trying to forget me, well, I'm sure my two hours were much worse than your two years."

John turned and kissed her.

"Well, it comes of not telling you everything. If only I'd told you that Lady Latimere was in a stew because he wants to go an Arctic expedition with some Italian fellow, and she'd been very short to him about it, and that last week when I was in London he'd dashed off to Italy to see him, you would probably have guessed she'd muddled the letters, and you'd have understood what she meant about the cold. Only she said I was not to tell anyone, another time I shall class you as some one, not anyone!"

"I thought she meant me by the cold; as I felt it couldn't be the weather at Raeford where you always spend your winters."

"Mary, 'pon my word!"

"Oh! you don't know what an awful mind I've got when it once gets on a wrong track, there's nothing I can't imagine."

"Evidently. I must take your imagination in hand, it's a pity for it to run to seed, you'd make your fortune as a novelist or a playwright." He was playing with the dark curls on her forehead. "Will you kindly apply it to say how I am to return this blessèd letter."

"Just send it back to her and say there's been a

mistake, and you hope if there was one to you sent elsewhere it did not require an immediate answer as you had not yet received it, and make no further comment. I do hope Lord Latimere won't go."

"He oughtn't to after this appeal, I shouldn't I know if you wrote to me like that, and it wasn't a case of duty."

"It looks as if she was very fond of him."

"I am sure she is. Very well, I'll do as you suggest. Good heavens! fancy if I'd said nothing, thinking your head was too bad, or for fear of giving the Lorelei away, what then?"

"Oh! don't, dear, I think I'd have had brain fever, as I'd rather have died than asked you and let you know I knew. It might have made me very ill," she spoke slowly and a lovely colour came up in her cheeks. The remembrance of her secret had come uppermöst again. She wanted so to pour one happiness upon another on him now, partly in reparation, mostly for love of him.

"I want to tell you something else now," she said very low, her beautiful eyes shining as she looked at him.

He bent towards her and took both her hands and kissed their palms.

"Another confession?"

"Not exactly, as this time it's your fault."

He looked puzzled for a moment, then his face cleared.

"Is it a nice secret?" he asked gently, but his eyes were light and eager, "something that is only for you and me?"

She nodded.

He held her passionately to him.

"This is the happiest day of my life. You love me and——" he whispered something in her ear. "Do say it once," he added,

"I love you and——" she shook her head and smiled, putting her finger on his lips.

"Does anyone else know?"

"No, of course not. Do you think I could have told anyone before you?" There was a very tender look in her face.

"Not even Marny?"

She shook her head. "I'll let you tell her, as it will please the old darling even more if you do it. Kirsty tried very hard to find out this afternoon, poor dear she's been dying to know ever since I first came here after we were married. But to-day she made a direct onslaught. However I parried it, though I think she's guessed. She's not as blind as you have been."

"Oh, Kirsty!" he laughed. "I'll be bound she made some caustic remarks. You haven't told me when yet."

"The end of April."

"'The month of sun and showers,
Of birdies' nests and budding flowers

he quoted. "It's my birthday month, too. What a present."

"Kirsty said that nothing made a man so proud o' hissel as when his wife was going to have a bairn, and that it makes a man very proud and fond o' his wife too."

"Much need for the latter, isn't there?" His eyes were deep blue as he kissed the pretty smiling lips.

"Now you must come and have a real rest before dinner," John Douglas picked her up as if she had been a baby herself, and carried her out of the room.

Late that night the storm cleared away, the moon looked down on a silvered world with an old grey tower silhouetted against the night sky, where two hearts had found their bourne.

THE END

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WITH YOU, RIGHT THROUGH

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